

learning links

Helping Kids Learn

www.learninglinks.org.au

Information Sheet 7

Surviving the Transition to High School

By Samantha Hornery, Director Southern Suburbs Branch

The transition to high school is a rite of passage in life's journey. I survived, you survived, other children have survived and so too will your current Year 6 child.

In primary school your child is well supported in a friendly environment where they have gradually become familiar with their surroundings, staff and routines.

Each morning for the last seven years they have lined up in the school playground after the bell rang, moved to one of the small selection of classrooms and spent an entire year with one group of thirty or so children and one teacher.

Each year, the class teacher became familiar with your family, knew about the sorts of things you did on the weekend and was sympathetic to the demands of your lifestyle. You might have been involved in reading groups in your child's class, gone on school excursions to the zoo and helped at the canteen.

Primary school has been a safe and enjoyable environment for both you and your child.

High school is a different ballgame – it is much a much bigger community and the personal touches are a bit harder to find.

Over time your child will become familiar with the environment, staff and other students. Over time you too will become familiar with the school.

Depending on your child's school, in high school your child may need to follow a map, read a timetable, wear a new uniform, be responsible for a locker and key, work with many teachers (sometimes up to eight in one day), complete assignments and essays independently, travel to school and make new friends.

There is no doubt high school takes some adjustment, and preparation is the key to a successful transition for your child.

High school is a wonderful place for your child to make new friends, learn new skills and eventually make important decisions about their career and future – they will enjoy it once they feel comfortable in their environment.

A story about a young girl called Emily and her transition to high school is featured in this article. Emily's experience is worst than most and is not meant to scare you. It was stories like Emily's that encouraged Learning Links to develop and successfully implement a Transition to High School program.

Emily is a child who has difficulty learning. Her experiences should never have happened but she now has systems in place to allow her to really enjoy her time at high school.

This article will take you through some ideas to make your child's transition to high school much easier. It will include tips on organising your child's study space at home (the summer holiday is an ideal time), preparing your child for travelling to school, role playing the first day of school and trouble-shooting some of the difficulties you may face.

Colour-coding for your child

It may seem a little strange that this receives such a prominent place in this article. It is here for a simple reason – one of the most important strategies for a successful transition to high school is colour coding your child's life! (Well, maybe not their whole life but at least everything related to school.)

Lots of people are well organised and find it easy to make sure everything is in place. For many children, especially those who have difficulty learning, being organised is not something that comes easily.

A good idea is to select one colour for each subject your child is learning about at school. Cover your child's books for each subject in the same colour paper (for example English books are all yellow, Maths all blue, etc). If you are able purchase or cover cardboard boxes for home in matching colours, your child can keep everything related to that subject in the same colour box at home.

Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

Early Childhood Services for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

School Age Services for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

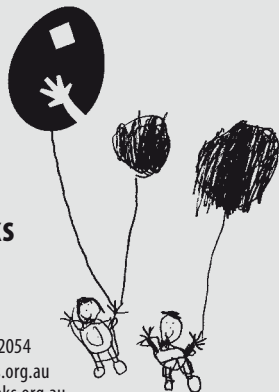
Family Services helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

Professional Development for teachers and health professionals.

Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.



Learning Links

Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Tel: 9534 1710 Fax: 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au
Website: www.learninglinks.org.au

Enquiries regarding this Information Sheet should be directed to Robyn Collins
Tel: (02) 9534 1710 Fax: (02) 9584 2054 Email: rcollins@learninglinks.org.au

© Learning Links 2006. The material in this publication cannot be reproduced without the written permission of Learning Links.

If the school wants some books covered in clear contact, put a coloured piece somewhere on the spine. This can be removed at the end of the year when the book is returned to school but will help your child in the meantime. If necessary tell the school that you are doing this to help your child become better organised.

Ask your child to write each subject's name in their diary using the same colour pen that you used for covering each subject's books.

This is a simple but effective method of helping your child stay organised and find things quickly.

Stationery supplies for school and home

It is a good idea to help your child organise their stationery supplies for school and home.

Try to purchase school supplies as early as possible and avoid the newsagent the day before or afternoon of the first day of school.

Some high schools have a pre-packaged set of stationery you can purchase that covers your child's needs at school. We suggest you contact your high school to check this option before buying anything as the package might be cheaper than buying the items separately. If you can't afford the package, you can go to a discount store and put together your own.

If your high school doesn't have strict requirements for stationery, your children can have fun selecting pens, pencil cases and other paraphernalia. Your child will need their pencil case stocked and a notebook for the first day of school.

For *school*, your child will probably need most of the following:

- pencil case – big enough to fit ruler and calculator,
- black, blue & red pens,
- liquid paper,
- other coloured pens,
- lead pencil, eraser & sharpener,
- coloured pencils, textas or zoom-type crayons,
- highlighters,
- post it notes,
- calculator,
- glue,
- scissors, and

- a set of mathematical instruments (set square, protractor, compass – check with your school).

If you are lucky enough to have been given a booklist for next year you can purchase these in the holidays and cover them before the year starts.

If not, purchase coloured covers and contact before school goes back so you're not scrambling to find ten different coloured wrapping papers at the last minute. Discount stores are a great source for cheap wrapping paper sheets and often have lots of plain coloured wrapping paper.

Many schools provide their own diary for children and if not, it is a good idea to have one anyway. It is worth phoning the school before the end of the previous year to find out whether a diary is supplied.

Ideally, your child's *home study environment* needs to be well equipped. You will most likely need:

- all the equipment in your child's pencil case, plus
- dictionary,
- thesaurus,
- atlas (bound or on computer),
- encyclopedia (bound or on computer)
- library card for local library,
- expandable file,
- coloured crates or boxes – 10 colours are recommended,
- stapler and staples,
- noticeboard for wall (half corkboard and half whiteboard with the corkboard for school notes and the whiteboard for quick notes and reminders),
- calendar to record term dates, excursions and assignment due dates,
- hole punch,
- sticky tape,
- paper clips,
- rubber bands,
- coloured paper,
- plastic sleeves,
- display folders,
- sheets of cardboard, and
- spare printer cartridges (if you have a computer).



Your child's home study area

The study area is a place where you will want your child to spend a fair amount of time over the next few years, so a clearly defined area for study designed in consultation with your child is ideal. Your child should have ownership over the area and feel comfortable in the environment.

The study area can be one room solely for the purpose of computers and study, a clearly separated section in a bedroom or a corner of the general living space – whichever suits your house and living arrangements.

If your child needs supervision and prompting to complete work you may find it more beneficial to create a study corner within 'eyesight'. If distractions hinder your child's ability to complete their homework, a separate room may be a better alternative.

Desks do not need to be large or cumbersome, as long as there is room for a computer (if you have one) and working space, this is all that is necessary.

Old wooden desks can be picked up at garage sales and painted up with a modern feel (even by your child) to create ownership of the area and space. You may also be able to purchase a second-hand computer (perhaps from a friend who is updating) that can run some basic programs and a printer – a simple word processing package can make a big difference in the presentation of assignments. Some computer programs are also available at reduced rates for students so don't be afraid to ask.

Check the lighting in the study area – your child needs to see clearly and not become fatigued when working for a period of time.

In houses where there is only one study area and more than one person vying for this space, a timetable to indicate who gets to use the study space at various times during the afternoon and/or early evening would be useful.

Shops such as Ikea have good organisation materials, with coloured boxes to store subject requirements and drawer systems to store stationery. Elizabeth Richards (Phone 02 9838 0865) is another good source of organisation materials, in particular coloured boxes. Don't overlook the local discount store – they may also stock these items.

Preparing for the first day

In early December each year, schools send forms to be filled out by parents for students who qualify for a bus or train pass. If you are not sure if your child qualifies, contact the high school in early November to check and if still in doubt fill in a form and submit it to the school.

Most schools start in late January/early February each year so it is a good idea to start special preparations about one week prior to the first day. The most important way of decreasing stress on the first day is to have a trial run trip to school.

To do this you will need to know the time the bell rings in the morning and train or bus timetables or a planned walking route to school.

Decide on the best way to get to and from school.

If it is by train or bus (or there is an option to travel this way that might be used on occasion), teaching your child to read a train or bus timetable is a valuable skill.

If the whole timetable (usually a book) is too overwhelming, photocopy the relevant pages and put a copy in your child's diary or bag. It is ideal to arrive 15-20 minutes before the bell to allow for things such as locker time and getting organised. A late child will be disorganised from the beginning of the day and may suffer disciplinary action as a result of that lateness.

Choose a train or bus that gets them to school with time to spare and that gives the child a couple of later options if they miss their first choice. For instance, if you have decided on an 8.00am train or bus,

Tips for teachers and high schools

High school is a difficult time for many children. One in every five children will have some sort of learning difficulty or disability, whether it is diagnosed or not. School rules can be flexible and considerate, while still ensuring that the school runs well.

Lockers – many times children find that they cannot easily reach their locker and often those with higher lockers have to wait until the children with lower lockers have finished before they can access theirs. Careful allocation of lockers and reasonable access rules can help minimise problems. Smaller students should not be allocated lockers that are too high for them to reach. Children could be given an opportunity to make sure they can reach their locker and see into it prior to final allocation. Similarly reasonably long access times, staggered times or perhaps a wide range of access times could be considered. This would take into account that in each set of lockers where there are three or more lockers in a vertical column, only a couple of children can comfortably access their locker at any one time.

Timetables – do timetables need to vary each week for children in Year 7? Could variety be kept for the older children? If variation is the only way of organising everyone, can variations be limited to a fortnightly cycle at least for younger children? If weeks are not the same, schools might like to consider making sure that the timetable has dates next to each week for the coming term. Even children without learning difficulties often struggle to remember which week is week two of a two-week cycle, let alone anything more complicated.

Coming to class with the wrong books – if a Year 7 child is continually coming to class with the wrong books, it is highly unlikely that they are doing it on purpose. Perhaps some careful questions might get to the bottom of the problem and have it solved in no time. If the child is too embarrassed to answer, perhaps a call to a parent might help. Don't overlook the fact that even in high school, some children find reading difficult.

Instructions – some children find it hard to follow a series of instructions. Instructions given slowly and carefully sequenced might help children understand what they need to do. Children continually getting instructions confused could be approached to discuss possible solutions. Don't overlook a potential learning difficulty as the cause of the problem.



show your child that there are also trains and buses at later times (say 8.05am and 8.13am) that will still get them to school before the bell. This way they will not panic if they happen to miss the first morning train or bus (or it doesn't arrive).

Explain to your child that trains and buses are sometimes late or cancelled and just because it comes at a different time than expected doesn't mean it isn't the right one. Tell them to ask if they are not sure by saying, "does this bus or train stop at (station or stop name)?" Don't forget to tell them whom to ask.

When you go to the train station or bus stop, show them how to buy a ticket in case they lose their pass. (It is a good idea to give them money to keep safe in case this happens.)

If your child is going more than a few stops on the train or bus give them a route map or train line map to keep in their bag. This way if they are chatting to a friend and suddenly panic, thinking they have missed their station, they can get it out and have a look. (Newer trains often have announcers that tell passengers the next station.)

Teach them the names of the two stations before their's so they know to start getting ready to get off.

If your child is going to a multi-platform train station (such as those at major suburban or city stations) and will need to change trains, it is an excellent idea to have a laminated route plan in their wallets.

The route plan could look like this:

Going to school

- Hurstville station – catch train from Platform 2
- Catch the 8.02 am or 8.12am train that stops at Redfern
- Change at Redfern and go to Platform 26
- Catch the 8.38am or 8.43 train to Strathfield

On your practice run go *all the way* to the school gate. This way you will know before the first day if you need to change their alarm and train or bus times.

Being too early for school can be a problem and if your child gets to school more than 20 minutes before the bell, it is a good idea to pack them a morning snack so they are not lethargic before their day starts.

If your child has an elder sibling you should still do this practice run.

It is important to physically stand on the place where they meet their sibling. A verbal description of their meeting place may not work because everything is so new.

The meeting place may be next to the front gate or inside the school on a certain bench. If your child is travelling with a sibling or older friend, you should have an emergency plan that will avoid stress if the sibling or friend does not show up.

Have an emergency plan such as waiting for 15 minutes and if the sibling or friend doesn't come, just go home. This also highlights the need for your child to know what to do without anyone else's help.

From a parent's point of view, it can be difficult waiting for a child who is meant to be home at 4.00pm and they have not turned up at 4.20pm. Protective instincts can kick in and you start imagining that they have had an accident when it's just a late bus or train.

Negotiate a time range that you expect your child to be home – I expect you home between 4.00pm and 4.30pm.

This will help your Year 7 child avoid silly decisions such as running to get on a moving train or crossing the road when it says don't walk, because they do not want to get in trouble for getting home late.

If your child is going to be more than 30 minutes late have a procedure they should follow. It will help them and you to stay calm.

Buy them a \$5.00 phone card for emergencies and put a laminated list of important phone numbers (such as mum and dad's mobiles and a grandmother's or close friend's phone number) in their wallets.

Do not assume your child will remember phone numbers when they are stressed or upset. Show them how to use the phone card and teach them about 1800 reverse. 1800 reverse can be used to make a phone call at any public phone without any money.

On your practice run, point out three or four public phones. (Many train stations have them on the platform.)

Buy your child a watch

It sounds simple but until high school, many children don't bother wearing a watch or don't need one. Suggest to a friend or relative that a watch might be a good present sometime in Year 6. High school children need to know what time it is especially before and after school.

Other ways to prepare

Most high schools have an orientation day where your child meets their year coordinator or school counsellor.

Make sure your child knows where to find this person in the school – for example Mrs Smith is found on the second level in the Maths' Department, room 213. This information will probably be available by ringing the school.

Your child should know that this is the person they need to see when things go wrong or they are feeling overwhelmed.

Finally, the night before the first day make sure your child has a good night's sleep (or at least gets in to bed early to rest even if they can't sleep) and spend some special time with them going over the 'running of tomorrow'.

Sleep routine

During school holidays it is easy to fall into a late sleeping pattern.

You will not be doing your child any favours by sending their body into a state of shock on the first morning of school when you wake them up at 7.00am not 10.30am if they have slept in all holidays.

Start by making sure your child has an alarm and knows how to use it. Ideally, they should be responsible for getting up and not rely on you to come in and wake them, although some children need extra help with this task! Start at least one week before school and get them up every morning at the right time for school.

Shopping

This may be too stressful or expensive for you depending on the relationship between your child and shopping, but taking your child grocery shopping so they can choose what they would like for lunch in the first week of high school is recommended.



This way, when they get to lunchtime in the first week they can eat something familiar and something that was their choice. The rest of their day might feel out of control and some comfort food at this time can work wonders.

Letter of Introduction

If your child has learning difficulties, I recommend an extra task before your child starts high school. It is wise to prepare a teacher information sheet about your child and make 10 copies.

If you can hand this sheet personally to each teacher and the year coordinator so they all understand your child's special needs. A one-page summary is all that is needed and give a full report to the school office, mentioning that it is available to all the teachers if they would like to read it. It is a great way to pre-empt some potential misunderstandings between your child and their teachers.

An example of a summary sheet is included with this article.

How your child may feel

The move to high school is an exciting but often fearful time for your child.

They may have a lot of different feelings or anxieties that they can't necessarily express clearly to their parents. Remember too that children going to high school are almost always going through or soon to go through the important physical transition to adolescence.

They may feel or experience some or all of the following during this transition phase:

- concern over safety,
- a feeling of belonging versus independence,
- grief and loss associated with the loss of childhood, missing people such as teachers and friends, loss of environment, loss of safety and familiarity,
- concerns over their identity,
- self-esteem and confidence issues,
- confusion,
- a feeling of being overwhelmed,
- anxiety, nervousness and worrying,
- a strong desire to do everything right,
- isolation and feeling misunderstood, and/or
- depression and sadness.

Positive aspects of the transition

The transition to high school is not necessarily stressful all the time. There are many positive aspects associated with this very important time. Your child may feel or experience some or all of the following:

- excitement,
- increased motivation,
- keenness to meet new people and make new friends,
- more independence,
- happiness because they know other children or adults at the school,
- identify themselves or be identified by others as an adolescent and not as a child, and/or
- a keen desire to become involved in more extra curricula activities such as sport and social outings with friends.

They may also like the school they are attending and the new teachers.

Fears about high school

It is common for children to have fears about high school. Fears usually fall into the following categories.

- *Schoolwork and homework* such as worrying about not being able to understand what the teacher is saying in class, too much homework (and it's too hard), not being able to do the work at all and feeling insecure about asking teachers questions or asking for help.
- *Social aspects* such as making new friends, being teased or bullied, being bashed or physically hurt by other children, looking stupid or silly in front others and doing or saying something embarrassing.
- *High school structures and routines* such as getting lost on school grounds, arriving late for class, asking strangers for directions, not being able to read the timetable, not knowing what books or materials to take to the next class and not knowing which class to go to for the next lesson.
- *Parental/familial expectations* such as not doing well at school, hating school, looking stupid and not doing as well as their sister or brother.
- *Myths and legends* (stories about initiation rituals, teachers, neighbouring schools and other children) such as having your head put in the toilet while it is flushed and stories about mean teachers and principals.

- *Teachers and discipline* such as getting into trouble during class, getting detention and scary teachers or not liking teachers.
- *Travel to and from school* such as missing the bus or train, catching the wrong bus or train, getting lost, asking strangers for directions and being late for school.

Fears and anxieties can present themselves in different ways. Children may have butterflies in the stomach, headaches and nausea or may sweat excessively. They may also be agitated and get the shakes.

We suggest that you talk to your child about how they cope with anxiety and what happens to their bodies when they worry or feel nervous.

How can you help your child?

The first way you can help is to *be organised yourself*. It will help you stay one step ahead in the transition process.

It is a good idea to set *routines for your child*. It may help to develop and write down before and after school routines with your child so that they know what to expect once they start high school. These routines may include set times for homework, chores and breaks. It may also be helpful to put this routine up on the wall above their study area.

Encourage your child to *talk about their thoughts and feelings*, especially in relation to their fears about high school. Listen to and acknowledge your child's fears.

Do not dismiss how your child feels as it may only make your child feel worse. Talk about your own experiences (if you can remember them).

Encourage your child to *discuss any potential fears or problems and think of ways to solve any causes of anxiety*. Making sure your child practises going to and from school should go a long way towards alleviating anxiety about travel and its potential problems.

Go through all the possible problems you can think of and discuss options for what to do if they happen – it all helps in preparing your child. We've included a list of practical problems to guide discussions with your child.

Talk to your child about how they cope with anxiety and feeling lousy and what happens to their bodies when they worry or feel nervous.

Encourage your child to *take up relaxation techniques* or offer other suggestions. Ask them what sorts of things make them feel better.

It is important that your child has different and creative ways of dealing with stress. It may be helpful for you to participate in these activities in order to foster appropriate role modelling as well as providing practical support.

Relaxation techniques can include meditation, listening to music, aromatherapy, massage, yoga, visualisation, progressive muscle relaxation, walking the dog, dancing or having a bath. The key to relaxation techniques is that they are practised daily and in a quiet and safe environment.

Communication is the key.

It is important that your child feels that he/she is able to tell you if they are not coping with high school.

You can encourage your child to talk to you by making time available to just be there for them, praising them often so that they feel good when they are with you and talking about your fears to them.

Encouraging a positive attitude can be very important. Encourage your child to develop positive thinking and self-talk about themselves, others and high school.

Look at your own expectations of your child. Do you have unrealistic expectations or pressures? Ensure that your expectations of your child are clear and reasonable.

It's not always easy in this fast-paced world where many families have two parents working just to repay the mortgage. Parents are people too and need their own down time and their own safe haven.

Above all, prepare both yourself and your child.

A little preparation before the important transition to high school can make the difference between a very hectic and stressful Year 7 and a smoother transition coping with the little hiccups that are a normal part of everyday life.

Practical questions for your child entering high school

You're 10 minutes late for class. The teacher has already begun her lesson. You are standing outside about to walk in.

What will you do and say?

You've arrived at maths class and realise that you've brought the wrong textbook.

What is the best thing to do?

You miss your train and arrive 20 minutes late to school.

Describe what action you will take?

You hop off the train and realise that you've left your jacket on the train.

What should you do?

You arrive home and realise you have left your geography textbook at school. You need it to do your homework.

What will you do?

You arrive home and open your bag and find you've picked up somebody's bag by mistake.

What should you do?

You're trying to do an essay for homework but you feel confused about what it is really asking you to write about.

What should you do?

You feel anxious because you don't understand what the science teacher is telling you. All the other students seem to understand.

What should you do?

You arrive at school and you realise you've left your English essay at home. It is due today.

What can you do?

You've attempted your maths homework but have been unable to get the answers correct for the first five questions.

Should you continue or what other plan do you have?

It's Friday night and you have three assignments all due on Monday. On the weekend mum and dad are making you attend a family BBQ on Saturday and your cousin's christening on Sunday.

What will you do?

You are travelling home by train and you fall asleep. You wake up to find you've missed your stop.

What will you do?

You are on the train station and you witness some Year 11 boys bullying and girl in your year.

What will you do?

You're away on a school camp and some children want you to join them smoking. You don't really want to but you're worried about them not liking you.

What will you say and do?

You open your locker and you think someone has stolen one of your textbooks.

What will you do?

You are getting on the bus when you realise you've left your bus pass at home. The driver is cranky and won't let you on without your pass.

What could you do?

During an exam you realise that the boy next to you is copying your answers.

What will you do?

You are doing a multiple-choice exam and one of the questions is really difficult.

What could you do?

You are half an hour late for an exam because mum's car broke down.

What will you need to do?

You get busted for talking in assembly and are given an after-school detention. This will mean you will miss your orthodontist appointment.

What could you do?

Emily's story

Emily is a student with learning difficulties.

I have been working with Emily for many years, teaching her how to read, write, spell and master simple mathematics skills.

When she was in Year 6 we contacted the high school and provided all the necessary paperwork – assessments, reports and details about previous intervention. The school was sympathetic and explained that they would monitor her progress during Term 1 before deciding on an appropriate course of action.

By the end of Term 1 Emily was at crisis point. She failed to turn up to one of her lessons so I phoned to find out why. Emily did not come to her lesson because she was on detention.

Emily is one of the most polite, cooperative and eager students I have ever met. I could not possibly imagine her being naughty in any of her classes. But she was not placed on detention for being naughty – she didn't bring her books to class.

This seemed a bit extreme, so at Emily's next lesson I began to talk to her about the issue further and nothing could have prepared me for the scope of her daily nightmare at school.

Emily could not read her timetable effectively.

Her high school has a six-day timetable with Wednesday being its own day every week. This means there is no continuity from one week to the next about the requirements of the day.

Monday in Week 1 is Day 1, but was not Day 1 again until Week 4. Because Emily couldn't read her timetable she rarely had the correct books or materials for her classes.

After two or three warnings Emily started to get detention notes sent home for forgetting her PE uniform. Emily is a sporty girl and enjoys PE, but because she couldn't read her timetable to know when she had PE she forgot her PE uniform and was placed on detention for it.

On a few of those occasions Emily has forgotten to go to detention and was not allowed to go on school excursions the following term.

Initially I thought the timetable was Emily's biggest concern. So I spent time helping Emily to read her timetable and recognise which materials were required for each class.

This is where the story became even worse.

Emily was also on regular detention from three of her other teachers. I could not understand this – we had taken what I thought to be all the necessary steps to adequately prepare Emily for high school, but there was a whole new story unfolding.

Emily couldn't reach her locker at school and so could only grab the books she could reach after performing amazing gymnastic feats. This meant that even on those few occasions when Emily had read the timetable properly she might still not be able to take the correct book to class because she may not be able to reach them.

As we were talking about the barrier of physically reaching the books, Emily also mentioned she confused her books at times.

On the first day of school Emily was really organised and eagerly covered all her books and labelled them correctly using her three favourite rolls of contact. This meant that some of her books were covered in the same contact.

This compounded the locker situation further as Emily not only had to reach the book, but distinguish which one was correct for the class by pulling them all down and reading the labels.

Emily wasn't doing this (because she couldn't) and instead grabbed the first one she could reach and took that one to class.

Her French teacher was not impressed by Emily's solution to this difficult situation. Emily's French and English books were covered in the same contact and were the same size. On a regular basis Emily would take her English book to her French lesson.

French was hard enough (that's another issue entirely!) without having the previous pages to refer back to.

Emily would get reprimanded for not having her French book, had a note written to her mother in her diary because the homework she completed the night before was not handed in (it was sitting in her locker). She constantly struggled to complete tasks in class without the appropriate book.

The English teacher was a little more understanding, asking Emily to complete the work on scrap paper and copy it into her correct book for homework, commenting how beneficial the extra practice would be.

Emily left school each day with a bag filled to the brim with scrap paper of her work (often unfinished), diary (useless) and a collection of exercise books (rarely the correct ones). She would get home and begin the arduous task of making sense of the mess in her school bag.

The end product was that each day's work was not written in the correct book (so there was no record of the day's activities when it came time to study for exams), homework was not finished completely (there were ramifications for this at school the next day) and the correct items for the next day may or may not have been packed back into Emily's bag.

This cycle was horrific enough, but it continued.

Emily's pencil case was not big enough to hold all of the items she needed for school, like her calculator and protractor set, so she had two pencil cases. I challenge you to draw a circle or measure an angle without a compass or a protractor or try to take notes with a compass. Another problem!

Emily is a great dancer and joined the dance troupe at school but was asked to leave after a term because she had only attended five rehearsals.

The reason for the missed rehearsals – Emily didn't write them in her diary or wrote them on the wrong day so wasn't sure when the rehearsals were on. The one aspect of high school that Emily would have enjoyed and excelled at was a failure for her as well.



This is an unnecessarily dramatic sequence of events I would like to never see repeated again.

Many of these issues could have been avoided by some simple planning and negotiation with the school. This is exactly what we did for Emily.

- Emily has had her locker moved to an area where she can reach it and see into it easily.
- Emily's diary, books and materials have been colour coded. Every time she sees anything written in blue in her diary she knows she will need her blue French book, blue folder for class and will store everything in her blue box at home.
- Emily's mum goes through a checklist each evening to check Emily has the correct tools for the next day.

It was simple but it worked. Emily can now go to school excursions again and has also been allowed back into the dance group. The dance teacher has written the dance rehearsal dates into Emily's diary.

Emily doesn't cry every morning – she is happy to go to school. She has now begun to take the correct books to school and has not been on detention since.

An Example of a Summary Sheet for a Child with Learning Difficulties

Susan Smith

Date of Birth

Address

Phone

Parent's Names

Parent's Contact Details

Background History

Susan is the eldest of three children and has had her hearing and vision checked. She has been attending speech therapy for comprehension difficulties for two years and is also receiving maths' tutoring once a week.

Psychometric Results

Susan had IQ testing on 1/3/99. The results found her to have below average verbal IQ but normal performance IQ.

Speech and Language Assessment Results

Susan had a CELF-3 language test on 4/7/01. The results indicated a severe difficulty following auditory direction and difficulty with reading comprehension.

It was recommended that she receive all her classroom instruction in written and verbal form.

Occupational Therapy Assessment Results

Susan was assessed when she was in Year 2. The results indicated poor fine motor control and poor pencil grip. Susan performs better when typing on a keyboard rather than writing notes.

Other

Please make sure Susan is seated at the front of the class.

We are happy to speak to you at any time about our child. Please feel free to ring us at home or work.

Sarah and John Smith

learning links

www.learninglinks.org.au

Early Childhood Services

– all enquiries to Head Office

School Age Services

– contact your local branch

Family Services

– contact your local branch

All other enquiries

– Head Office

Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Telephone: (02) 9534 1710
Preschool: (02) 9533 3283
Facsimile: (02) 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au

Northern Suburbs Branch

2 Alfred Road
PO Box 634
Brookvale NSW 2100
Telephone: (02) 9907 4222
Facsimile: (02) 9907 4244
Email: nsb@learninglinks.org.au

Western Suburbs Branch

Unit 7/9 William Street
PO Box 1026
Fairfield NSW 1860 (2165)
Telephone: (02) 9754 2377
Facsimile: (02) 9755 9422
Email: wsb@learninglinks.org.au

Southern Suburbs Branch

10 Railway Parade
Penshurst NSW 2222
Telephone: (02) 9580 4888
Facsimile: (02) 9580 4788
Email: ssb@learninglinks.org.au

South West Sydney Branch

88 Shropshire Street
PO Box 42
Miller NSW 2168
Telephone: (02) 8783 7111
Facsimile: (02) 8783 7222
Email: sws@learninglinks.org.au

Eastern Suburbs Branch

1/20 Silver Street
Randwick NSW 2032
Telephone: (02) 9398 5188
Facsimile: (02) 9326 5364
Email: esb@learninglinks.org.au