

# Helping Kids Make the S.H.I.F.T. into High School

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This past month I was asked to do a keynote for a group of parents who wanted to know how to help their kids handle the transition from Middle School to High School.

This isn't the kind of keynote I usually do. Usually I'm speaking to High School students, educators or community leaders. Parents are a whole other breed!

When I first got asked if I wanted to do this kind of keynote by my Manager, Sara, I replied, "Sara...I don't have any kids...I can't stand in front of a room full of parents and give them advice on raising their children! That's like Tiger Woods speaking to a group of newly-weds on what it takes to have a successful marriage."

After I got over my initial anxiety (keep in mind I spend the majority of my time hanging out with teens), I realized **what a great opportunity** this is to help parents help their kids.

Besides, I've got some pretty awesome skills. For example, I can speak two languages: English and Teen (OMG, LMAO, BRB), I get to watch movies like Twilight and call it "research", and I can text at a speed of 48 words per minute. These things come in handy in my line of work.

We spent some time during the evening making connections; looking at how different our perspectives can be at times and talking about how to create a safe space to discuss these differences with our kids. We also discussed how parents can help their kids make one of the most difficult transitions that they have to make based on what youth have told us.

Here's a taste of how Parents can help their kids make the **S.H.I.F.T** from middle to high school:

**S** - Be **supportive**. Youth making the transition to high school are about to go through what research shows is one of the most difficult transitions in their lives. Sick Kids Hospital reviewed [the literature](#) for the Ontario Ministry of Education and found the difficulty can be due to factors both within and beyond the school (social class, gender, and/or minority group status, etc). One of the "big rocks" I took from the report was that High School is really a time when young people are trying to **BE** who they are (when they don't always fully know), working on **BECOMING** someone new, and striving to **BELONG**.

When we are aware of this, it becomes a bit easier for us to understand the challenges that teens are facing. It's a much different world for teenagers. That's not my opinion, that's based on what they've told me. A lot has changed. Teens are dealing with all kinds of challenges aside from the traditional ones of high school (such as homework and getting good grades).

**H**- Be **honest** with feelings; with yours and those of your kids. Acknowledge how you're feeling about them going to high school. Share your fears, what you hope they achieve, and what you're experiencing. You're not making yourself vulnerable as much as you're showing them you're real. There's research out there that suggests that parents who encourage their children to talk about feelings, like anger and sadness, were more likely to raise resilient kids.

**I - Be Inclusive.** Encourage kids to be part of the decision making process in your family. There are some things that kids should not be brought into, like financial matters, but encourage your kids to help make decisions that affect the whole family. This provides youth with a sense of belonging and understanding of who they are. For example, sitting down at dinner tonight, talk about what you and the family are going to do for the upcoming holiday period.

**F -** Help teens understand that "**failure**" isn't a bad word. I meet so many young people who are terrified of failing. They're terrified of letting their parents down. I talk a lot about this one. I speak to teens, to educators, to business people and I want to know more about this word that we've conditioned ourselves to fear and avoid. It turns out that failure is only failure if we don't learn from it and use those lessons to make ourselves better.

**T-** We surveyed hundreds of teens, educators and adults. The number one quality they look for in their relationships is **Trust**. Parents say the biggest fear about their kids going into high school is that they might get involved with the wrong people.

When I asked the youth at this school what they were looking forward to the most, one of their top responses was meeting new people. Can you see where this might go? The very thing youth are excited about is what parents are worried about. Get this out in the open as soon as possible.

John Holt, an American author and educator once said, "*To trust children we must first learn to trust ourselves...and most of us were taught as children that we could not be trusted.*"

Play Big!

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