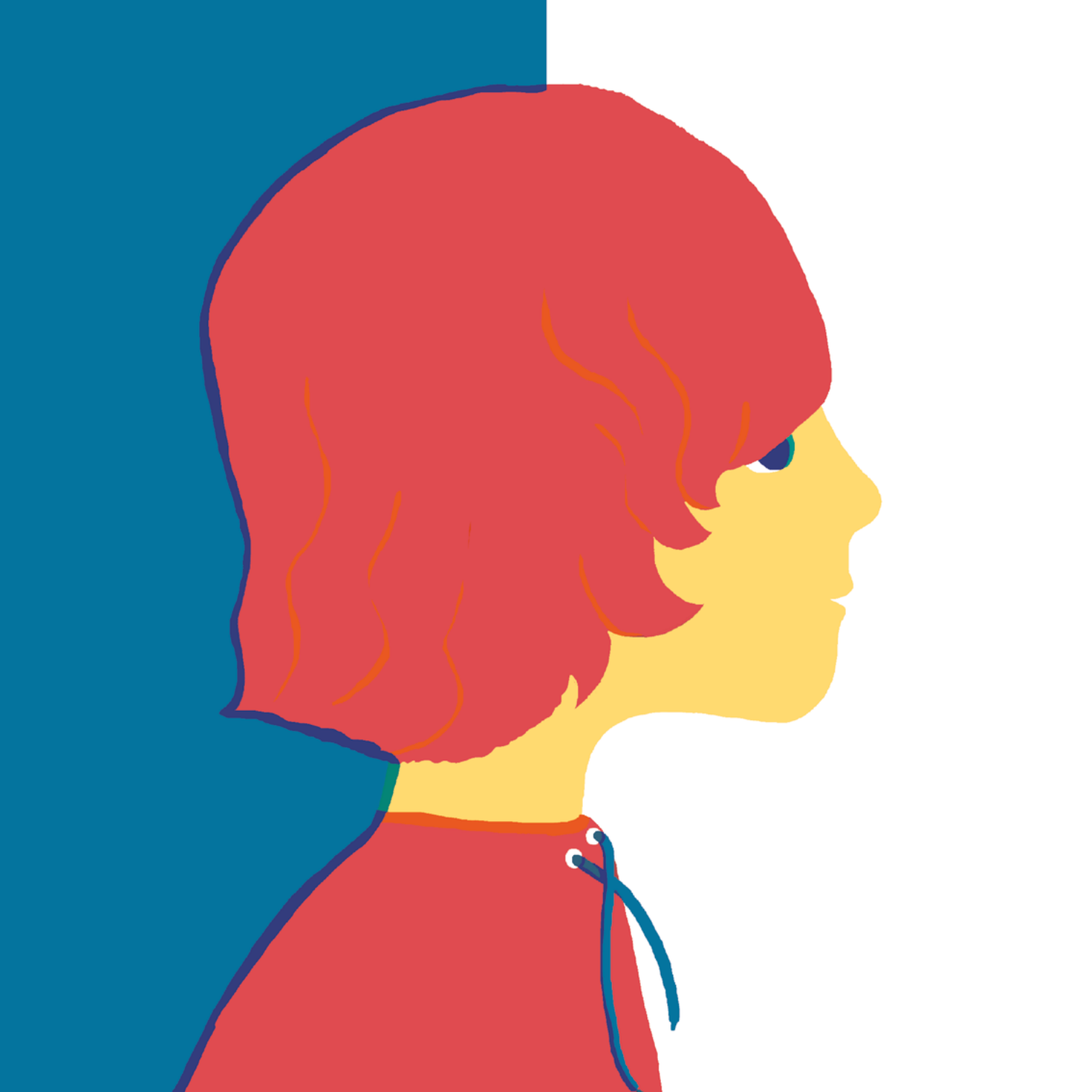




Welcome to
**LOWER
SECONDARY
SCHOOL!**



DEAR PARENT,

Primary school is now over, and your child is moving into year 7 of school. A new, exciting phase is just around the corner. Lower secondary school brings many new things to a child's schooling experience, and its importance continues to be felt in later studies. A student's time in lower secondary school is also about growing up as well as the joy and sometimes also the challenges that come with it.

Starting the seventh year of school will likely bring at least some stress for your child, and potentially also for you as a parent. How will your child get started with their studies? How will your child find their place in a new classroom and school? Your child needs your support. It is important to discuss issues that arise in lower secondary school with your child.

As a parent, you should be enthusiastic and encouraging when it comes to your child's entry into lower secondary school. Parents' trust in the school and the teachers as well as their appreciation for the school are reflected in their children, influencing the child's study motivation and attachment to the school environment. We hope you will find this guide supportive and helpful in the transition to lower secondary school and related matters.

Warm regards,

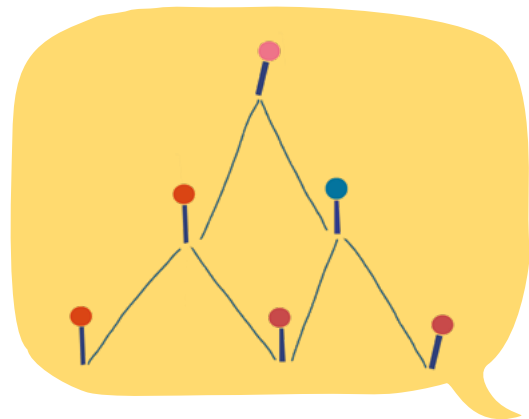
The Finnish Parents' League
and Förbundet Hem och Skola

SCHOOLING CHANGES IN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Students' schooling changes in lower secondary school in many ways. There will be more subjects and the school days will be longer. The class teacher will be replaced by separate teachers for each subject and a class supervisor who is responsible for the class and general school-related matters. For many students, starting lower secondary school means a new school, a new class, and new classmates.

At this level of school, studying requires students to be more independent and take responsibility for their own schooling. There will be more elective studies and students will be able to choose some subjects according to their own interests. A school's activities are guided by the school curriculum, which specifies what is studied at the school and how the school's activities are conducted. The curriculum is usually provided on the school's website. It is a good idea for parents to review it as well.

The curriculum is intended to promote the joy and enthusiasm of learning and a proactive approach to learning. A range of different methods are used in teaching: experimentation, investigation, and utilisation of functionality and mobility. As part of their schooling, students also learn outside the classroom: for example, they

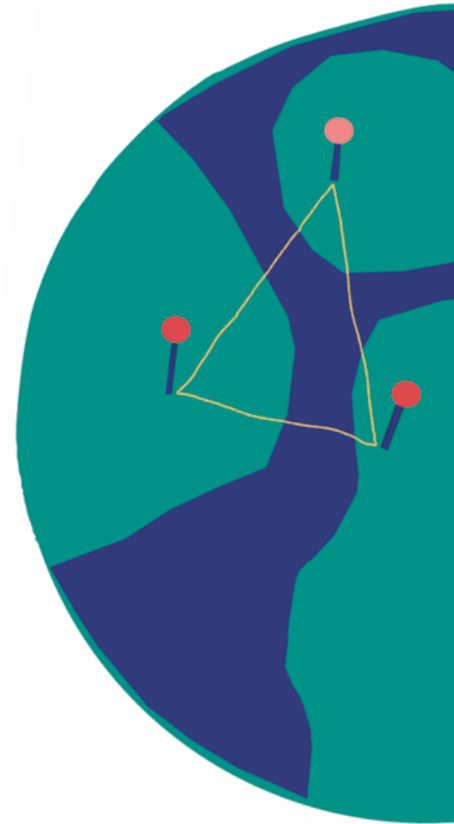


may go on nature excursions or visit museums and businesses. Games and other virtual environments can also serve as learning environments. Information and communication technology plays an important role in learning.

In all school subjects, there is an emphasis on a wide range of competencies – cross-curricular skills required for future working life and studies. Each school has at least one theme, project or module per school year, combining the contents of different subjects and addressing a chosen topic from the perspectives of several subjects.

Assessment of students is varied, aiming at encouraging and guiding their learning. In addition to the marks on their reports, students receive feedback in a variety of ways – for example, through assessment discussions that involve both the student and the parents. Students also engage in the assessment of their own skills and in peer review. A school should keep students and their parents informed of the progress of their studies with reasonable frequency.

Key matters related to school curricula are provided on the [Finnish National Agency for Education's website](#).



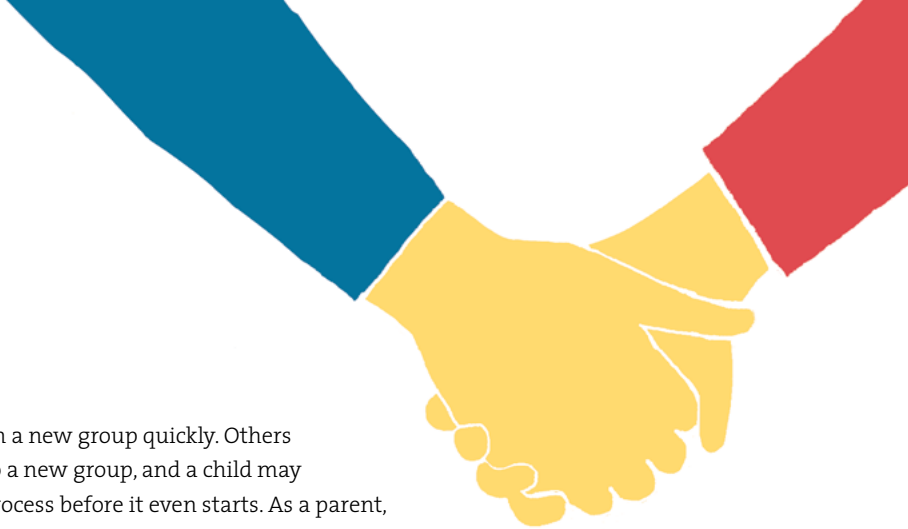
ENTERING A NEW CLASS – THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

- Friends and belonging to a group are important to every child. A child should feel like an important member of the classroom and school community.
- Discuss school friendships at home and keep the doors of your home open to your child's friends.
- Loneliness and bullying are matters that always require intervention. Don't keep such issues to yourself – get in touch with the school.

From a child's perspective, everyday school life often takes on meaning through friends: going to school is nice when you have friends there. Friends and belonging to a group are important to every child. A child should be able to feel like an important, full-fledged member of the classroom and school community. Belonging to a group increases comfort and safety at school and has been found to improve students' learning performance. However, friends can also be a source of peer pressure in matters related to outward appearance or substance abuse, for example.

The initial stage of the seventh year of school is important for forming friendships and feeling part of a new class. In many schools, at the beginning of year 7, activities are organised to promote group cohesion amongst the students in a certain class. As part of these activities, students get to know each other, practise interaction skills and form a safe, functional group. Class spirit is built and care is taken to ensure that none of the students are being left out. Schools also have support students, whose role it is to organise activities, theme days and events that encourage friendships.





Some children find their place in a new group quickly. Others take more time to integrate into a new group, and a child may experience stress around this process before it even starts. As a parent, you can be a source of reassurance for your child. Generally, integration into the class goes well, and you don't have to worry about it.

You may also want to discuss school friendships with your child. You can ask your child what the new class feels like, what your child's classmates are like, and whether they've made new friends. You can support your child's friendships at home by showing interest towards their friends and keeping the doors of your home open to them.

If a child is being left out of groups at school, the matter should always be addressed. If your child talks about loneliness and being left out, it is advisable not to think about it only at home by yourself but to contact the child's class teacher as well. Together with the school and your child, you can discuss how to encourage friendships and group integration.

Bullying at school should also always be addressed. If your child talks about bullying at home, listen and reassure your child and be supportive of them. If your child has not reported the bullying to the school, make an agreement with your child whereby you as a parent can contact the child's class teacher. It is the school's responsibility to always intervene in situations of bullying, and the school should have a plan for how to do this. If you suspect that your child is taking part in bullying, keep calm and make it clear to your child that bullying is not acceptable. Listen to your child and contact the school.

Schools are also increasingly providing support to parents so that they can become acquainted with one another and network together. This is just as important in lower secondary school as it is in primary school. As parents get to know one another, they can work together to strengthen students' wellbeing and to help ensure that no child is left out of the group.

COOPERATION BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL IS NECESSARY IN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL

- Cooperation between home and school is just as important in lower secondary school as it is in primary school. Lower secondary school has a significant impact on a child's later studies.
- Lower secondary school students also appreciate and benefit from parents taking an interest in their studies and school attendance.
- Cooperation between home and school has become more interactive, functional and inclusive for parents.
- It is important for lower secondary school parents to get to know one another and network together.

Cooperation between home and school is just as important in lower secondary school as it is in primary school. Lower secondary school has a significant impact on your child's later studies. It is also connected with growing from a child into an adolescent and the challenges that come with it. It is of paramount importance that there be cooperation between home and school to support the child's growth, learning and schooling.

Children may tell their parents that they do not want them to go to the school, that they are not needed there. As a general rule, however, a child will be satisfied with the interest shown by their parents and with them visiting the school from time to time. The school should also take an active role, inviting parents to come to the school, reminding them of their importance, and that cooperation between home and school is vital.

The manner of cooperation between home and school varies from school to school. Parents' nights are held at all schools. Parents' nights have become more discussion-oriented and interactive in recent years. They also provide parents with an opportunity to get to know other parents. There are some parents' nights in which students are involved as well. Schools also organise various events and festivities to which parents are invited. Parents

are also increasingly seen in everyday school life. Parents can take part in classes to talk about their profession, hobbies or other skills, for example. Students may also visit their parents' workplaces.

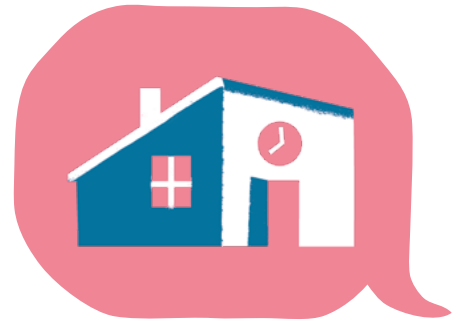
In lower secondary schools, communication between home and school often takes place through digital services such as Wilma or Helmi. Some schools also use social media channels for their communication. Class parents may have their own WhatsApp groups, or something similar. Schools also use their own websites to communicate with parents. The assessment and development discussions already familiar from primary school continue in lower secondary school.

Parents are increasingly involved in the development of school activities. The school may use questionnaires to ask parents about their views. Parents may be invited to participate in workshops or school workgroups, or parents' nights may be used to discuss current topics related to school activities.

Many lower secondary schools have a parents' association. A parents' association brings together the parents at a school and supports the students' welfare at school in various ways in collaboration with the school and the students. In many lower secondary schools, after getting to know each other, the parents' network and work together to support the students' wellbeing in the class. If the school does not support parents' networking, parents can take initiative themselves and propose it.

It is always worthwhile to participate in the cooperation between home and school when you have the opportunity. By taking part in this cooperation, you will get to know the teachers and school activities, which makes it easier to support your child's schooling. Getting to know other parents at the school and in your child's class provides support for parenting and enables parents to network and discuss common issues.

If any issue about your child's schooling is bothering you, don't hesitate to contact the class teacher or other trustworthy member of the school staff. If the issue is clearly associated with one particular school subject, you can contact the teacher of that subject. You can also ask the school headmaster about matters related to school attendance. The services of a school nurse, doctor, social worker and psychologist are available in lower secondary schools, just as they are in primary schools. You as a parent can also contact them directly.



A CHILD IN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL NEEDS PARENTAL SUPPORT

- Children entering lower secondary school hope that their parents will support them in this transition, in discussing school-related issues, and in other aspects of their schooling.
- All parents are able to provide support in their children's schooling. Above all, children need encouragement and incentives from their parents.
- Ask about how your child's school day has been every day. Convey a clear message to your child that you are available and supportive. At home, talk positively about school and studies.
- Encourage your child to persevere and be persistent when completing school assignments.
- A child has the right to receive support from their school with issues relating to learning and schooling when needed.

Support

Encourage

Ask

As children get older and enter lower secondary school, they often tell their parents that they will be taking care of their own schooling from that point on. They still need parental support and help, however. It is easy for parents to suppose that a lower secondary school student is already old enough to take care of school-related matters independently. In Finland, there is a long tradition of early independence, but it is worthwhile to remember that parental support is as important to lower secondary school students as it is to primary school students.

Though friendships are important as a child enters adolescence and the importance of friends becomes heightened, research has shown that children want to discuss school issues and the transition to lower secondary school with their parents and to receive help, support and encouragement. Assisting them with homework and school and providing advice continues to be important.

Together with your child, discuss school and your child's school experience every day. Ask about how they are doing at school. Don't settle for answers along the lines of "It was OK"

– instead, ask questions to get your child to tell you about the school day, such as “What went well today?” or “What inspired you today?” Give your child time and uninterrupted moments to talk. Set a good example as a parent. Make it a family habit to share the events of the day.

Parental interest in a child’s education encourages and inspires the child to study. Talk positively about school and studying at home. If a parent has a positive attitude towards school, this will strengthen the child’s attachment to school and motivate them to study. Regular discussions about school-related issues with your child can also help you determine whether your child is experiencing stress, exhaustion, or pressure at school.

Every parent, regardless of their own educational background, can support their child’s schooling. Above all, a child needs social support from parents (encouragement, incentives, help with difficulties and disappointments). Even if your child was able to complete homework assignments on their own in primary school, lower secondary school brings with it new subjects and new kinds of challenges that your child may need parental support with. For example, your child may need assistance with scheduling their schoolwork. You can make a habit of asking your child about next week’s schoolwork and help them outline the workload for the week. This will also send a clear message to your child that you consider their schoolwork important and will provide support. Notice and emphasise your child’s strengths. Reflect together on how these strengths can help in their studies and day-to-day school experience.

It is a good idea to pay more attention to your child’s schoolwork and investment in it than in the final outcome. This prioritisation is also emphasised in the school curriculum. Going to school is not always fun, and school assignments may sometimes require significant effort. Encourage your child to persevere and be persistent. Praise your child for trying and for overcoming challenges. Note, however, that children who experience learning or schooling difficulties are entitled to support from the school. Support should be provided to the extent and at the level the child needs. If you are concerned about your child’s learning performance or feel that your child is receiving insufficient support from the school, you can contact your child’s class teacher or the principal.

The school also provides support in any challenges related to a child’s growth or behaviour. If you are concerned about your child’s behaviour, mental health, or any other matters relating to your child’s development and growth, don’t hesitate to contact the school’s nurse, social worker, or psychologist. Their job is to help the children!

LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL IS A TIME FOR CONSIDERING FURTHER STUDIES

- Your child's studies after basic education and planning for the future should be kept in mind throughout lower secondary school.
- When it comes to future educational choices, parents and others in a lower secondary school student's immediate circle of people are the primary source of information for these students.
- Encourage and inspire your child to make their own self-directed choices during lower secondary school and when thinking about further studies.

During lower secondary school, children think about their future and decide where they will go when they have finished their basic education. Although a decision about further studies is only made at the end of lower secondary school, it is good to keep these studies and future planning in mind throughout lower secondary school.

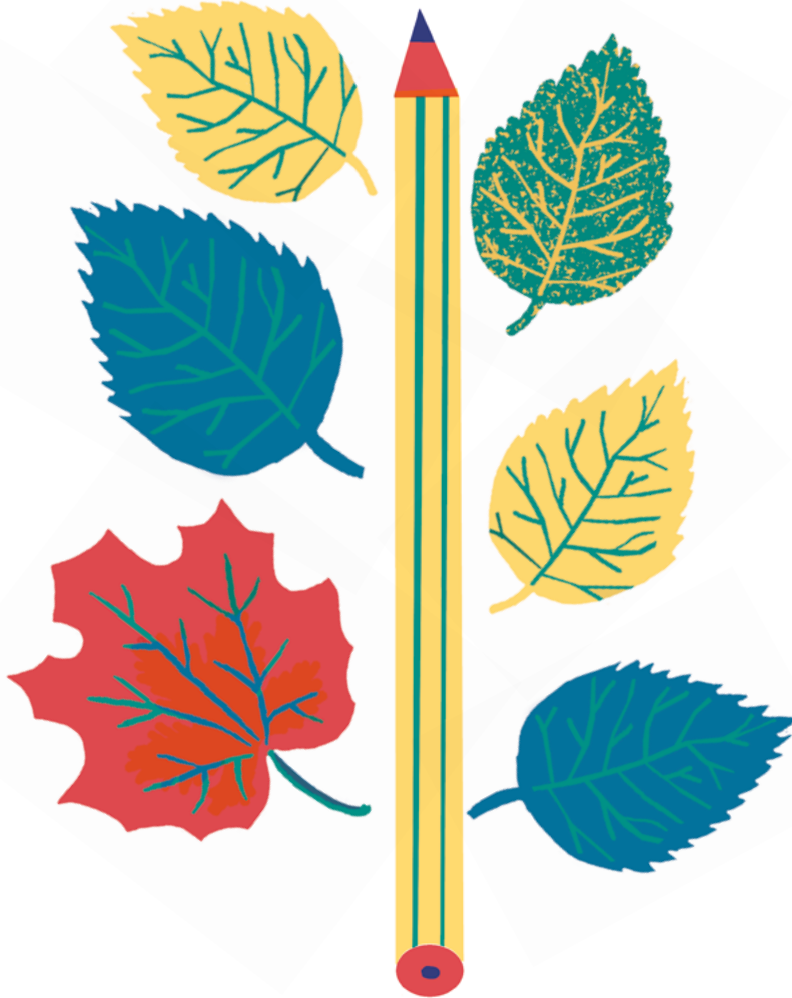
Parents have been found to play a substantial role in helping their children reflect on their educational choices. Parents and others in a lower secondary school student's immediate circle of people are the most important source of information when the student thinks about their future field of study. Friends can also play a huge role in educational choices.

Lower secondary school students need support from their parents in reflecting on their future. With your child, discuss their strengths, interests, aspirations, and thoughts about working life. It is important to remember that educational choices are the child's own choices, for which the child must be motivated. What children need from their parents is support for reflection, not necessarily direct advice.

Adolescents' career choices in Finland are still strongly divided by gender: girls tend to be interested in care-related fields and boys in technical fields. Encourage and inspire your child to make their own self-directed choices, regardless of their gender or their friends' choices.

In lower secondary school, students receive support for planning their future and educational choices through student counselling. Student counselling is organised in the form of separate lessons, which are supervised by the guidance counsellor (a teacher who specialises in student counselling). Student counselling addresses issues such as study skills and schooling, self-knowledge, what path a student will take later in their studies, occupations and working life, among others. In addition to student counselling classes, all students can receive counselling and guidance when needed, either personally or in small groups.

During the upper years of basic education, students are given opportunities to begin familiarising themselves with working life, in support of the students' future educational and career choices. In most cases, students are introduced to working life through periods of work experience (so-called TET periods) lasting for one or two weeks. Explore and learn about the different TET locations with your child. You can also offer the school your own workplace as a location for TET.



HEALTHY HABITS AND EVERYDAY ROUTINES

- Parents have an important role in taking care of the everyday routines and wellbeing of lower secondary school-aged students at home, so that they can study at school.
- Sufficient sleep and exercise, a varied and healthy diet, and appropriate restrictions on social media use and digital gaming form a basis for wellness.

SUFFICIENT SLEEP

Getting an adequate amount of sleep is a prerequisite for the wellbeing, healthy growth and learning ability of children and adolescents. Sleep is especially important for lower secondary school students, as physical growth alone requires a certain amount of sleep. Sleep also plays an important role in learning and memory. It enables the learning of new things and long-term memorisation of what has been learned.

A lower secondary school student needs about 10 hours of sleep a night. The amount of sleep needed is not constant – physical and mental exertion increase the need for sleep. For example, a child needs more sleep and rest after a busy period of studying or strenuous sports activity. Sleep restores the body from the strain of studying or physical exertion.

It is worth talking to your child about the important functions of sleep. For children of lower secondary school age, sufficient sleep and rest is not something that can be taken for granted – going to bed and falling asleep can easily be delayed. You should try to establish a regular sleep routine as this will ensure sufficient rest, making it easier to fall asleep in the evening and to wake up in the morning. The evening – about an hour before bedtime – is a good time to wind down from any digital gaming, so that falling asleep will be easier. Sticking to a sleep routine requires patience and the setting of boundaries on the part of the parents. Tips on this can be found in places such as the [Mannerheim League for Child Welfare's website](#).



SUFFICIENT EXERCISE

Exercise has many positive effects on the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents. Exercise can reinvigorate, affect their mood, improve their energy levels and sleep patterns, and enhance their learning performance.

Recommended exercise for children of lower secondary school age is 1.5 hours per day, half of which should be vigorous exercise. Regular exercise or a child's own personal training patterns will meet part of their daily exercise needs. Much of the recommended exercise can be met with everyday routines such as in-school physical education, commuting to and from school by bike or on foot, mobile activities with friends or family, and so on. Increases in daily in-school exercise have also increased the overall daily exercise levels of lower secondary school students. Shorter exercise moments can amount to a student's daily dose of exercise.

As a parent, you can support your child's exercise habits by encouraging exercise routines, encouraging your child to go outside, walk or cycle to school, or by encouraging the whole family to participate in sports activities together, for example. In lower secondary school, a child's hobbies may change: old hobbies may be replaced with new ones, or the child may want to try out new activities or sports. It pays to be open about changes in your child's interests. It is important that your child does something they enjoy – hopefully, this will include exercise as well.

A VARIED AND HEALTHY DIET

A healthy diet and regular eating patterns are an important part of the healthy growth and development of children and adolescents. Nutrition affects a child's health and wellness, as well as their mood, ability to cope with school, and overall wellbeing. On average, a school meal covers about one third of a child's energy needs for the whole day. Meals at home and at school are complementary of each other.



According to a survey on school health, nearly all students in primary schools eat school-provided meals five days a week. By contrast, only two out of three students in lower secondary schools report eating school-provided meals each day. At home, it is worthwhile to talk positively about school meals and encourage the child to eat at school, as an encouraging attitude from parents will affect how often their children eat at school. School meals can also be brought up at a parents' night as a shared topic of discussion for the class parents, or in a parents' association. Family members do not always have time to sit down at the dining table together due to their personal activity schedules, but it is important for parents to ensure that children eat their supper. Things such as eating together, conversations about the day, and relaxation over evening meals enhance the wellbeing of the whole family. More information on school meals can be found in [Eating and Learning Together – recommendations for school meals](#).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL GAMING

Social media is part of the daily lives of many children and adolescents. Social media can be used for communicating with friends, passing time, searching for information, and seeking and receiving peer support. It is a good idea to regularly discuss with your child the principles of using social media safely. Issues of concern, such as online bullying, should be addressed at parents' nights as well.

Digital gaming is a favourite hobby of many children and adolescents. It can be a way to have fun and relax together. As a parent, you should take an interest in what games your child is playing and learn more about these games. Finding a proper balance between gaming and other aspects of everyday life is important for your child's wellbeing.



FROM CHILD TO ADOLESCENT

- Living with adolescents can be both rewarding and challenging. Get to know other parents in your child's class, network with them, and consider working together with them as parents of adolescents.

Lower secondary school coincides with a child's entry into early adolescence. The child starts to become independent, may distance themselves from parents, and needs space to develop their own identity. Friends become more important and their opinions often take precedence over the parents' opinions. At the same time, a child still needs their parents and parental support.

Children in lower secondary school spend time thinking about a wide range of issues related to growth, personal appearance, dating, sexuality, and the use of alcohol and other substances. Every adolescent goes through puberty in their own way and at their own pace but needs the support and guidance of adults close to them. At school, themes related to maturation and adolescence are covered in health education classes, but it is important for adolescents to discuss them with their own parents as well. Adolescents may challenge the boundaries set by adults, and they may make mistakes. As a parent, try to create an atmosphere in which your child will feel free to tell you about their mistakes and failures.

Living with adolescents can be rewarding and often challenging at the same time. It is therefore important that parents have the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with other parents. School offers a great opportunity for this – get to know other parents in your child's class, network with them, and think together about issues related to the parenting of adolescents.

**THIS GUIDE IS AIMED
AT PARENTS WHOSE
CHILDREN ARE STARTING
YEAR 7 OF SCHOOL.**

Parents' interest in their children's schooling encourages and inspires children to study and strengthens their attachment to school.

**EFFECTIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN
HOME AND SCHOOL COMBINED WITH
PARENTAL SUPPORT**

- supports learning and growth
- increases motivation and wellbeing at school
- strengthens appreciation of schooling



HEM OCH SKOLA

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