



Welcome **TO UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION!**

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO ARE FINISHING BASIC EDUCATION

CONTENTS

1.	For parents	3
2.	Applying for upper secondary education	4
3.	Upper secondary studies: general and vocational schools	6
4.	The importance of school friends and the broader school community	10
5.	How the home and school environment interact	13
6.	Upper secondary education as a new study environment – your role in supporting your child towards independence	16
7.	Finding the right fit for your child: Go to work or enter higher education? ..	18
8.	Healthy habits and everyday routines	22
9.	From adolescent to independent young adult	26

1. FOR PARENTS

So, your child has now completed basic education and is preparing for the move to upper secondary, a big step for your child and, indeed, the whole family. This is a very important stage as the increased independence in their studies means that the choices made here pave the way for the student's higher education path and eventual career aims.

As mentioned, at this point your child is faced with various education options as well as the challenge of entering a new learning environment. As with all changes, this can be both exciting and stressful, certainly for the student but also for you, the parent. It is important to remember here that despite the fact that your child is taking on more responsibility and taking a first tentative step into adulthood they will continue to need your support and encouragement.

We hope that this guide will offer you help and support in your child's transition to upper secondary education, and the reflections that come with it.

Warm regards,
Finnish Parents' League
and The Swedish Parent Association in Finland

2. APPLYING FOR UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Be open to your child's choices – support their decision on upper secondary education.
- There are no “dead ends” in the Finnish school system: whether a student chooses a general upper secondary school or a vocational institution, in both cases it is possible to move on to higher education.
- Learn more together about the schooling option your child has chosen before they start school.
- Following basic education, there are programmes that a student can attend to prepare them for upper secondary studies, such as Year 10, VALMA (pre-vocational preparatory education), or LUVA (preparatory training for general upper secondary education).
- The primary way of applying for upper secondary studies for youth is through the joint application procedure. Vocational study programmes have a continuous admission process as well. Application periods and methods vary from one educational institution to another.

Your child is making some fairly major decisions, including but not limited to future studies, their own, particular plans for the future, and various options and even dreams. It is a truly exciting time and as a parent it is essential that you find a balance between giving advice, being open to your child's own aspirations and trying not to let your own school experience or perhaps even preconceptions impact on the dialogue. Together you can discuss what options are available, perhaps visit different schools on the schools' open-door days or when they hold informational sessions.

After completing basic education and before the start of upper secondary education, it is possible to apply to Year 10, or to the VALMA programme, which prepares students for vocational studies. A student can use Year 10 to raise the marks they received during basic education, and in the one-year-long VALMA programme, they can find a field of work and training programme that interests them. LUVA is a programme oriented towards immigrants and other native speakers of a foreign language, intended to prepare them for general upper secondary education.



THE JOINT APPLICATION PROCEDURE AND STUDENT ADMISSION

Student admission to upper secondary school and placement in vocational institutions is determined by the grades received in a predefined set of school subjects, as indicated on the basic education certificate. General upper secondary schools may also have their own entrance examinations, with a minimum grade average if they so choose. Placement in vocational institutions is very similar but considers other aspects such as general school performance as well as the grades achieved in an entrance examination. Vocational institutions also have a continuous admission process, meaning that it is possible to flexibly apply to them throughout the year. Schools provide information on their websites regarding application periods and procedures.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S STUDY CHOICES

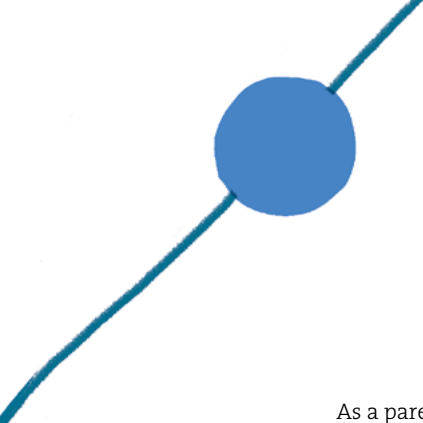
It is important, and also comforting, for you and your child to keep in mind that the study choices made here are not irreversible. Should it turn out that these choices no longer fit with your child's idea of their future, they can switch or modify them. As parents, we should be active in encouraging the right fit for our children, the right path here paves the way for application to university, a university of applied sciences all the way to a doctoral degree.

Some key matters related to upper secondary studies are covered on the Studyinfo portal maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education: <https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/>.



3. UPPER SECONDARY STUDIES: GENERAL AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

- At general upper secondary schools, students have mandatory and elective studies. The scope of general upper secondary education is at least 150 credits, and it can be completed in three years.
- Vocational education and training follows Finland's national qualification structures, which are based on competence points. A vocational upper secondary qualification entails at least 180 competence points.
- It is possible to earn a "double degree" by simultaneously completing both general upper secondary studies and a vocational upper secondary qualification. Additionally, a student can take the Matriculation Examination.
- With the recent extension of compulsory education in Finland, upper secondary education has become free of charge for all students.

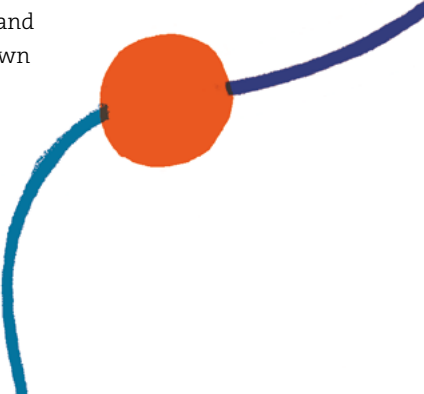


As a parent it is of benefit to familiarise yourself with the curricula of your child's place of learning. These can normally be found on individual schools' websites. Knowing what is studied, how your child's learning is supported, evaluated and demonstrated will help you to understand what is involved and enable you to better support their study activities at home.

At vocational institutions, the nationwide qualification requirements serve to define what a vocational upper secondary qualification entails, what the targeted learning outcomes are, and how competence is demonstrated and evaluated. The curricula of general upper secondary schools and the requirements for vocational upper secondary qualifications can normally be found on individual schools' websites. As a parent, it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with these curricula and requirements. Doing so will help you better understand your child's studies and support their study activities at home.

Key aspects of curricula are covered on the Finnish National Agency for Education's website, oph.fi/en, and on the ePerusteet portal (eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en) you can learn about Finland's nationwide vocational qualification requirements.

Studies in both general and vocational upper secondary institutions are broad in scope and flexible, leaving students with significant room to make their own individual study choices. Your child will be given the knowledge, the skills, and competences they need for higher education, their career paths and their own personal development.





In general upper secondary school, a student creates a personal study plan with the support of teachers and guidance staff that includes not only the courses the student will attend, but also a plan regarding the Matriculation Examination, higher education studies, and their work career. Vocational institutions use the personal competence development plan (PCDP, or HOKS in Finnish) to identify and recognise a student's existing competence, and to map out what competence development the student still needs, and how it will be obtained in various learning environments. The PCDP makes it possible to focus on a student's goals, career plans, existing competence, needs and life situation, and to map out any necessary guidance and support actions.

In both general upper secondary school and vocational institutions, the work, learning, and competence development of students is evaluated from many different angles. The purpose of such assessments is to guide and encourage students in their studies, and to develop their ability to self-evaluate. At the conclusion of general upper secondary studies, students prepare to take the Matriculation Examination. The subjects that a student chooses to focus on in the Matriculation Examination have an impact on their future studies, as the application process to higher education is primarily based on the Matriculation Examination Certificate. At vocational institutions, competence is demonstrated mainly in practical, on-the-job work situations. Students who pursue a double degree complete both the vocational qualification and the Matriculation Examination.

SUPPORT IN LEARNING

A student has the right to receive support during their studies. In general upper secondary school, students who have difficulty making progress in their studies due to a special language impairment or other learning difficulties are entitled to receive special instruction or other learning support based on their own individual needs. In vocational institutions, a student has the right to receive special learning support if this support is needed due to learning difficulties, injuries, or illness. Additionally, student welfare services, including the services of a nurse, doctor, social worker, and psychologist, are available in upper secondary education just as they are during basic education.

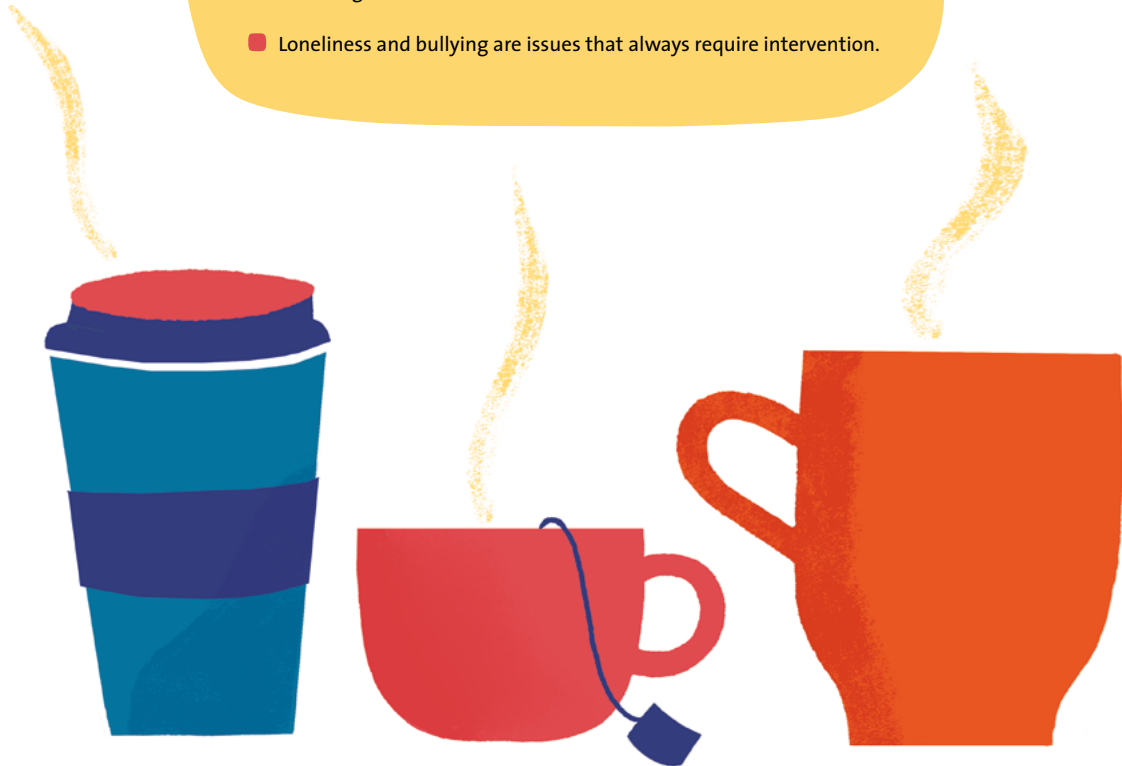
You can read more about student welfare services on the Finnish National Agency for Education's website (oph.fi/en).

EXTENSION OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION

As the age limit for compulsory education has extended to 18, upper secondary education has become free of charge for all students. This means that not only are classes free of charge, but also textbooks and other material, tools/garments/materials needed for studies, fees related to the Matriculation Examination, and commutes of more than 7 kilometres to/from school. School meals were already free of charge to all upper secondary students. The lack of charges for these services will also affect the financial aid provided during upper secondary studies. If a student has any concerns related to this aid, they can request assistance from their school's social worker, or from the school secretary/study secretary. You can read more about the extension of compulsory education on the Ministry of Education and Culture's website (minedu.fi/en), and more about financial aid during upper secondary education on KELA's website (kela.fi/web/en)

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL FRIENDS AND THE BROADER SCHOOL COMMUNITY

- Friendship and a sense of belonging is important to people everywhere. They should be able to feel like an integral member of their group and the wider school community.
- Discuss starting in a new school with your child and ask how they are doing.
- Loneliness and bullying are issues that always require intervention.



Your child should be able to feel that they are an integral, fully-fledged member of their school community. Friendship and a sense of belonging to a group is important to young people everywhere. The importance of group inclusivity is heightened during upper secondary education, where studying is flexible and takes place in many different groups. In general upper secondary school, students usually belong to the same age group but in vocational school, adolescents and adults study together. Belonging to a group enhances your child's ability to feel at ease and safe at school, and it has been found to improve learning performance as well.

The start of your child's time in upper secondary education is very important to their integration into groups, and connection to the school community. Relationships with peers are a great source of strength for your child's wellbeing – but they can also cause peer pressure towards e.g., the use of alcohol and other substances.

In many schools, at the start of the school year, new students are organised into groups to do various activities, with the aim of fostering a group spirit and ensuring that no one is left out of the student community. Many schools also use tutors – older students – who organise activities to promote students' integration into groups, as well as theme days and other events.

Some students quickly find their place in the new environment. For others it takes longer, and they may feel nervous about stepping into a new learning environment before they even begin to do so. At home, it is a good idea to talk with your child about starting in a new school, and their school friends. You can ask them how it feels to be attending a new school, what other students in their group are like, and whether they have made any new friends. At home, you can support your child's integration into groups and the school community by taking an interest in their school friends and the school community's activities, and by encouraging them to become acquainted with other students and participate in school activities that promote group belonging.

LONELINESS AND BULLYING

At home, try to create an open atmosphere of conversation in which your child feels that they can tell you about their loneliness, feelings of exclusion, or experiences of bullying. If your child can talk openly about loneliness, it can serve to decrease the negativity surrounding it. If your child talks at home about their experiences of loneliness, exclusion or bullying, you should listen and provide support. Always intervene in situations where your child is left out of groups or if they are bullied at school. Bullying can also take place on the internet, thus extending outside of school but still affecting your child's studies. The discussion of these issues ought not to happen only at home, it is important that you, together with your child contact the coordinating teacher or student welfare service. The school is always obligated to intervene when bullying, harassment, or violence is observed, and they must have a plan for how to do so. If you suspect that your child is taking part in bullying, talk with them about what a safe learning environment looks like, and how all students are entitled to such an environment.



5. HOW THE HOME AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT INTERACT

- Cooperation between home and school is important at the upper secondary level, just as it is at other levels. Young people in upper secondary education value and benefit from their parents taking an interest in their studies and participating in the school's activities.
- In order to work properly, cooperation between home and school must be interactive, and provide parents with the opportunity to engage in school activities. It should also involve listening to the students and getting them involved.
- In upper secondary education, it is also important for parents to meet one another and network together.

Upper secondary education has a significant impact on your child's higher education choices, as well as their future career paths. It is crucially important for home and school to work together and support students' maturation, learning, and ability to make life choices as they become more independent.

It is possible that your child will tell you that they do not need you and can complete their studies on their own. However, it is more likely that your child will be happy with the interest you show and when you attend parents' nights at school, engaging in cooperation with the school. In upper secondary education, cooperation between home and school often emphasises monitoring and supporting the studies and wellbeing of individual students.

MULTIFACETED COOPERATION BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Methods of cooperation between home and school vary from school to school. Parents' nights are organised at all schools. In recent years, they have become more discussion-oriented and interactive. They are also used as opportunities for parents to get to know one another. At some parents' nights, the students may also be present. Additionally, schools organise various events and functions – such as open-door days, evenings, or “pop-up” study days – to which parents are invited. Additionally, parents can be present during normal school hours, for example, parents may be involved in running work life teams or summer job markets, or students may visit parents' workplaces.

The mode of communication between home and school varies from school to school. Often, the Wilma service or an equivalent digital system is used for communication. Some schools also use social media channels and school websites in their communications.

PARENTS AS PARTICIPANTS IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY'S ACTIVITIES

Schools should be active in making parents a part of the school community's activities. Schools can collect information on parents' viewpoints via questionnaires, or parents can be invited to workshops or working groups. Parents may also be involved in a school's collective pupil welfare services, planning activities aimed at strengthening the wellbeing of the students and the school community.

It is worthwhile to participate in cooperation between home and school in upper secondary education. This participation allows you to familiarise yourself with your child's teachers and studies as well as the school's activities. Cooperation with the school also makes it easier for you as a parent to support your child in their studies. When parents get to know one another, it helps support the parent community and makes it possible for them to network together. If a school is not actively supporting parents towards this goal, you can be active yourself and propose to the principal that a parent's night be organised to allow people to meet one another.

Some upper secondary-level institutions have a parents' association. Parents' associations are more common at general upper secondary schools than at vocational institutions, even when they are equally needed in both places.

A parents' association allows the parents to work together towards common goals and supports the wellbeing of the school community in various ways. If a school does not have a parents' association, the parents may be active and propose the founding of one.

As parents it is worth participating in the cooperation between home and school, thus allowing you to familiarise yourself with your child's studies, teachers and the school's activities making it easier for you to offer support. When parents get to know one another, it helps support the parent community and makes it possible for them to network together. If a school is not actively supporting parents towards this goal, you can be active yourself and propose to the principal that a parent's night be organised to allow people to meet one another.

REACHING THE AGE OF MAJORITY CHANGES THE NATURE OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Upon reaching the age of majority, significant changes occur in the cooperation between home and school. Parents are no longer informed of their child's educational progress and no longer have access to Wilma or similar communication channels unless their child so wishes.

It is important that your child's voice is heard as part of the cooperation between home and school. When your child feels that they are able to have an impact on their own studies, the school environment, and the development of the school's activities together with adults, they will likely want the cooperation between home and school to continue even after they have reached the age of majority.

6. UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION AS A NEW STUDY ENVIRONMENT – YOUR ROLE IN SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

- Assist, but not direct, the planning and target setting involved in your child's studying.
- Encourage and praise their efforts in school, rather than just their achievements.
- What are your child's strengths? Identify them and discuss them with your child.
- Take an interest in both your child's studies and hobbies, learn enough about both areas to be able to discuss them.

With increased independence comes more responsibility for the students concerning their own studies, there is an increase in the amount of schoolwork and a greater need for self-discipline. As a parent, you can work with your child to help them to develop effective time management, set limits based on their resources and encourage them to make weekly schedules outlining what should be done and when. This is a hugely beneficial set of skills, and this framework will greatly benefit your child in later life, increase their motivation whilst enhancing their confidence in completing their studies.



THE DEMANDS OF SCHOOL INCREASE IN UPPER SECONDARY

Many students find upper secondary education to be very demanding with an increase in student burnout. Listen to your child, talk to them and remind them what they will achieve by persevering with their studies despite the occasional setback or when challenges occur. Your support, encouragement and empathy are vital to the success of your child.

7. FINDING THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOUR CHILD: GO TO WORK OR ENTER HIGHER EDUCATION?

- Higher education studies and planning for the future are relevant matters throughout a student's time in upper secondary education.
- Nowadays, the communities offered by social media heavily affect young people's ideas of the future.
- Encourage your child to make their own, self-directed choices.
- Do not leave your child alone with their choices – your support as a parent is needed in considering the future.

Although the decision as to whether to continue studying or enter the workforce is made at the conclusion of upper secondary education your child will spend time considering their options and planning for the future remains very relevant throughout this period.

In recent years the multiplicity of informational input has dramatically increased. Along with parents, guidance counsellors, the websites of higher education institutes come other aspects of the internet and social media. This has the potential to be overwhelming and young people may become passive or worried.

Students in upper secondary education need their parents' support when considering their future. Talk with your child about their strengths, interests, desires and potential working life. It is important to remember that the direction of a study pathway is your child's own choice, for which they need to be motivated. What your child needs from you as their parent is support for reflection, not direct advice.



GUIDANCE COUNSELLING AS SUPPORT FOR PLANNING THE FUTURE

Students in upper secondary education also receive support in planning their future and in their choice of studies and career from guidance counsellors. In general upper secondary schools, students receive personal guidance, guidance in group format, course-internal guidance as well as small-group guidance and peer guidance. In vocational institutions, the vocational upper secondary qualification includes studies that serve to strengthen the students' skills for planning their studies and career. Guidance counselling is provided not only in class, but also one-on-one and in groups. The purpose of guidance counselling is to support students towards finding their own interests and recognising their own strengths, as well as to provide support in career planning and problem solving.

COOPERATION WITH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND WORKPLACES DURING STUDIES

During upper secondary education, students are given the opportunity to visit higher education institutions and workplaces and become more familiar with the associated requirements. The purpose of connecting students with higher education institutions and workplaces is to help them find their own path in their future studies and careers. In vocational institutions, studies focus on working life, and learning periods in the workplace provided to students offer a comprehensive view of one's potential future occupation. Many vocational institutions also collaborate closely with universities of applied sciences.

TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION AFTER UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Over half of student intake in universities is determined by the marks received on the Matriculation Examination. In universities of applied sciences, student intake is also based on the marks received on the Matriculation Examination or the marks received on the vocational qualification certificate. Students are no longer selected on the basis of a combined total score reflecting the entrance exam and the student's school-leaving certificate, but it is still possible to apply to higher education institutions solely on the basis of an entrance exam.

One can also begin studying at a university or university of applied sciences via the "open channel". This refers to studies at an open university or open university of applied sciences that, when completed, entitle the student to apply to a university or university of applied sciences as a degree student. More information about the "open channel" can be found at the Studyinfo portal maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education (studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/higher-education/open-studies/).

8. HEALTHY HABITS AND EVERYDAY ROUTINES

- Getting enough sleep is essential to learning and wellbeing.
- Exercise along with a varied and healthy diet are important everyday habits.
- A balanced day-to-day routine supports your child's ability to learn and study.
- As a parent you need to be aware of how young people are impacted by the use of various media.
- Help your child recognise the different forms of stress and how to deal with them.

Healthy habits serve to support your child's ability to persevere, learn, study and advance in school. A regular, varied and healthy diet, a sufficient amount of sleep and exercise, and the ability to plan and manage their own time form the basis for a healthy way of life.

It is important that you as a parent show interest in your child's social life, even when it mainly occurs in different social forums. By showing such interest, you build trust between your child and yourself. When there is an open atmosphere of dialogue based on trust, it is easier to discuss the importance of healthy habits with your child, and support them in maintaining them.

EXERCISE

- Physical exercise is needed to counteract the time spent sitting.
- Exercise reinvigorates and benefits your child's health and wellness and can improve their learning capacity.
- Part of your child's everyday exercise can consist of the commute to and from school by bicycle or walking.
- By starting with small steps, it is easier to make exercise a part of their way of life.

NUTRITION

- Just like muscles, our brain needs energy in order to function.
- Healthy food on weekdays can serve to balance the treats eaten on weekends.
- At home and at school, sharing meals with others can positively contribute to your child's overall wellbeing.

SLEEP

- Mental and physical effort increases the need for sleep, and the body needs more time to recover.
- A sleep deficit is rectified during deep sleep – it is not fixed by sleeping more hours.
- If your child continually experiences sleep disorders, it is a good idea to consult student health services for help.
- During sleep, the things your child has learned while awake are stored in their long-term memory.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND THE USE OF MEDIA

- Time management skills are needed in order to properly separate study time and leisure time.
- It is important to find a balance between sitting in front of a computer or phone and other activities. Special attention should be given to finding that balance, since a substantial portion of school studies are now done digitally. The balance is thrown off by, among other things, the increased amount of time people now spend playing games and using social media.
- Studies have shown that the more time young people spend on social media, the weaker their performance as students becomes.
- On the other hand, time spent sharing and producing information on social media has been shown to have a positive effect on learning.
- Multitasking increases the number of potential distractions, as it impairs concentration and the ability to finish, remember and learn things. Deep learning requires the ability to concentrate.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER SUBSTANCES

- Intoxicants have a negative effect on sleep, memory and concentration.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Be aware of where your child is spending time and with whom.
- Try to avoid being judgemental – that way, your child will be less hesitant to confide in you.
- By providing a good example, you can protect your child from the negative effects of alcohol and other substances.

You can read more about preventive work against substance abuse on EHYT's (Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention) webpage, under "[Tukea eri elämäntilanteisiin](#)" (in Finnish).



STRESS CAN BE BOTH BENEFICIAL AND HARMFUL

As mentioned previously, your child's stress levels may be elevated upon entering secondary education. There are various potential contributing factors such as new classmates, the new topics of study and the increased workload and responsibility to name a few. A certain amount of pressure may be beneficial in such things as maintaining focus and task completion however, prolonged exposure to intense stress has harmful effects on wellbeing and must be carefully monitored. It can be challenging for your child to learn to recognise when they need rest and recovery instead of heightened performance.

To make progress in their studies, your child needs to know how to manage stress. As a parent, you can serve as a good example to them and show that you are taking care of your own wellbeing. In that way, your child will also learn to identify their own mental and physical resources and ensure that they get sufficient rest. You can also help your child recognise when they have done enough, by reminding them of what they have already accomplished. You can read more about school-related stress and stress management on Nyyti ry's website (nyyti.fi/en).

STRESS CAN BE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND IF YOU THINK OF IT IN TERMS OF TRAFFIC LIGHTS

- An alarm indicating that your child's mental and physical resources have run out.
- Some typical symptoms include exhaustion, depression, indifference, memory problems, and a cynical approach to studies.
- If your child displays symptoms of severe stress, you should immediately contact student health services. This is not an irreversible situation, but recovery will take time and often professional help is needed as well.

- This indicates a reasonable level of pressure.
- The situation is under control.
- Mental and physical resources are sufficient, and there is enough free time for recovery.

- An alert that your child is operating at the limits of their capacity.
- This can manifest itself as anxiety, fatigue, difficulties with concentration, restlessness, and through various physical symptoms, such as headache, stomach-ache and sleep disturbances.
- To achieve balance, a change is needed.
- As a parent, you can support your child by helping them rank things in an order of importance and reorganise their everyday routine by making time for sufficient rest and recovery.



9. FROM ADOLESCENT TO INDEPENDENT YOUNG ADULT

- Your child is approaching the age of majority and beginning to forge their own identity as an adult. The most important thing you can do as a parent is to support this process and to be available when your child needs someone to bounce their thoughts off or air their feelings to. As a parent, you do not need to know the answers to every question, but you can help your child get oriented on their life path.

Reaching the age of majority and becoming independent is a major change for your child, as it is for you as a parent. Life with an adolescent approaching adulthood can sometimes be challenging, but also highly rewarding. It is important to spend time together as a family and relax. You don't have to spend that time doing anything special: even eating a regular meal or watching TV together can go a long way. Even when your child needs space to grow into their own person, you are still needed as a parent. Show your child that you are interested and that you are there for them. Listen and give encouragement. Maintain a good dialogue and atmosphere of discussion, in which trial and error are permitted. Be happy and proud of your child on their way to adulthood!





Suomen
VANHEMPAINLIITTO



HEM OCH SKOLA

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