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High School: Getting Prepped

What's the best way to keep from feeling nervous and confused? Action!

Your first day of high school may be months away, but you can start preparing for it now with these ideas.

Orient yourself

Chances are, your high school has an "orientation day" for incoming freshmen. This will be a great opportunity for you to:

- Tour the school and get a sense of how it's laid out. Where are the classrooms for your scheduled courses? How long will it take you to get from class to class?
- Meet teachers and school counselors. If you take the time to introduce yourself to them, you'll be more likely to stand out from the crowd once freshman year starts.
- Find out which classes and electives you might be taking. Is there suggested summer reading or viewing that might help you get a leg up?
- Preview some of the clubs and sports you can join. If you have an idea of what you want to get involved in, find out if there's anything you should practice (like your batting swing or guitar) that will give you an advantage, especially if you'll need to try out.
- Meet your fellow future freshmen from other schools. Be sure to smile, say hi, and be generally friendly to people, especially those who you know will be in your classes. It's a great head start towards making new pals.

Before orientation day, you might even want to sit down and write up a list of questions to ask while you're there.

If your high school doesn't offer a special orientation day, or somehow you miss the one that was scheduled, talk to an adult about arranging a time to visit the campus before the official start of freshman year.

See who's been there, done that

If you have an older brother or sister who's already in high school, then you've probably already heard and seen a lot through his or her experiences. Still, it's worth sitting down with your sib to ask some specific questions and clear up any misconceptions you may have. If you don't have an older sibling, seek out the sibs of friends and neighbors to get the inside scoop. Some questions you may want to ask include:

- Is it really true that _____ is a tough teacher?
- Are there any electives that are especially great?
- Know any good shortcuts from one part of the school to the other?
- What's the worst lunch the cafeteria serves? What's the best?

Identify your support system

Your high school already has people and programs in place that will help you make the leap, such as:

- Teachers, counselors, and administrators who are trained and available to help freshmen get adjusted. Make a note of these people when you see them at orientation, or ask your current middle school counselors to put you in touch.
- Peer mentoring programs where freshmen are paired with older students for advice and support.

You can also go right to some of your future teachers. For example, if you play clarinet, talk to your music teacher about helping you arrange to meet the high school band leader ahead of time.

Get a taste of high school life

A great way to feel more familiar with your future school is to:

- Attend high school plays and musical productions.
- Check out sports games (and cheer them on, of course).
- Get a hold of school publications like the newspaper, yearbook, and literary magazine.
- Surf around its Web site, which may help you identify teachers, students, and locations at the school.

Get your parent involved

The more you look at this as a team project between you and your parents, the easier it will be. The adults in your family can:

- Help you decide which courses and electives to take.
- Give you advice on which clubs and activities to try. Be sure to talk about how extra time spent at school might affect the family, such as with transportation or babysitting duties.
- Talk to your high school teachers and counselors about any questions you have.
- Talk to parents of existing students and other incoming freshmen.

<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife>

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