AIB Future Sparks

AIB First Year UNLOCKED

01 Unlock your SCHOOL

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First-year parent tip sheet.

Top tips from Guidance Counsellors, Marie and Ursula.

As Guidance Counsellors, we know that the transition to secondary school is about much more than settling in. It is the beginning of a journey towards independence, confidence, future opportunities and lifelong skills. The habits, attitudes and routines developed in first year provide important foundations for wellbeing, learning, confidence and future wellbeing.





Do	Don't	Reasoning
Do encourage your child to use digital calendars, reminders and planning tools responsibly. Talk regularly about online behaviour and digital footprints.	**Don't** assume that because they are confident with technology, they know how to use it effectively or safely.	Digital literacy is now a key life skill. Learning how to manage information, communicate respectfully online and use technology productively will benefit young people throughout education and employment.
Do encourage your child to be independent in getting organised. Encourage them to; have their clean uniform ready and pack their own schoolbag including gym gear and other equipment the night before school, to put their uniform in the laundry, and to set reminders on their phone for important deadlines.	**Don't** take responsibility for packing their schoolbag or searching for their uniform on the morning of school.	Encouraging teenagers at this age to take responsibility for these activities empowers them to become more independent and enables them to develop their organisation skills and develop responsibility.
Do assist them with colour coding their timetable and/or buying zip pocket folders to organise their different subjects. **Do** familiarise yourself with all the supports in your child's school and the key people you should connect with, depending on your child's needs.	**Don't** take responsibility for all of this organisation. Make sure to involve your child in all activities. **Don't** forget to become familiar with their timetable and new school journal. **Don't** expect your child to be able to become organised all by themselves overnight, especially if they struggled with this in primary school. **Don't** delay in connecting with key personnel in your child's school, for example if your child has specific educational, medical or care needs. The earlier you get in contact, the sooner your child will be offered any relevant supports.	Organisation helps your child get set up for success. By colour coding their timetable with them and/or buying zip pocket folders or similar to organise the different subjects, your child will be better able to manage and organise themselves. Students who struggled with organisation and self-management will require more input and support from you. The first month is the most important and after that, they may be in a good routine of practice and better able to organise themselves. These early organisational habits are also future-ready skills. Managing equipment, meeting deadlines, planning ahead and taking responsibility are skills that employers, colleges and apprenticeships value highly.

Do	Don't	Reasoning
Do make time to be very present with your child in the first few weeks of school.	**Don't** panic if they seem quiet or very tired in the first few weeks.	The first few weeks in secondary school are a big adjustment. They need time to find their feet. Lots of support, a listening ear and routine will help.
Do build in a small window every day for study from early on. Encourage reflection as well as completion. Ask "What did you learn today?" rather than focusing solely on grades or homework completion.	**Don't** talk negatively about your own school experience.	Young people are very influenced by their parents. Being positive about their education means that they will be more likely to be positive. Research shows that positive parental involvement in your child's education leads to greater student success and increased confidence. Over-involvement on the other hand is not helpful as it hampers a child's ability to learn and grow. Curiosity, persistence and problem-solving are increasingly important skills in education and the workplace. A focus on learning rather than performance helps develop resilience and confidence.
Do plan for success with school work and build rewards and incentives into your weekly routine. **Do** offer support around homework and study and schedule in time to work on these together. **Do** plan for consequences and rewards by discussing this as a family. Praise them a lot when they are good.	**Don't** nag and criticise about homework and study. **Don't** make grand threats when you are angry that you won't be able to stand over.	Nagging and criticising do not work. In fact, they can be counterproductive. Positive encouragement and praising your child when they are good are crucial. Do not think they are too cool or are getting this praise elsewhere! Everyone loves praise and children need it from their parents/guardians, now more than ever.
Do listen actively when your child opens up. Active listening includes paying full attention to what someone is saying rather than thinking about what you are going to say back, making eye contact, paraphrasing what the speaker has said and repeating it back to them to make sure you understand, asking questions, being patient, and being non-judgemental.	**Don't** jump in and disrupt the flow when they are talking about something that happened in school or with friends. **Don't** feel like you have to fix it or jump to conclusions. **Don't** panic if they tell you they are anxious or stressed. This can be a very real experience but it is normal. Do a little research before giving a response.	Young people feel respected when they are listened to. If they are not listened to, they will stop trying to communicate with you. Allowing them to speak freely has many benefits, for example it allows them to express themselves, solve their own problems and build trust with their parents/guardians. Rushing in to fix all their problems disempowers them and is a missed opportunity for their skills development, especially around resilience building. If you are concerned for your child, have a check in with your GP or do some research - there are great free resources available to help parents get informed such as Parentline.

Do	Don't	Reasoning
Do notice when and where your child is most likely to talk to you. **Do** encourage them to communicate with their teachers.	**Don't** get annoyed when they want to talk with you when you are busy or it is time to go to bed. **Don't** nag about the amount of time they spend chatting to friends. **Don't** always be the one to speak up for your child, if they can self-advocate, encourage it!	When your child wants to talk to you, that is the perfect time! Unfortunately we cannot schedule this; we need to be patient, flexible and respect that communication is often on their terms. Parents often find that their child talks when the house is quiet, at bedtime, when alone in the car, or when you have your hands full. These precious moments allow you an insight into your child's life and allows them to feel supported. Your teen may talk to their friends or to the 'cool' aunt/uncle - be pleased that your child is speaking with someone you trust to support them. It is important your child learns the skill of communication, learns to build relationships with teachers, and feels empowered to use their voice.
Do create connection time - Netflix, sports, eating out, etc. Ask: **What** was the best part of your day? **Do** you need a few minutes before starting your homework? **Can** I help you with anything?	**Don't** expect them to tell you about their day every day like when they were in primary school. **Don't** pass judgement on friends too quickly - tread with caution and be curious before jumping to conclusions.	At this stage, teens are not going to tell their parents everything as they are now more inclined to do this with their own peer group. However, if you make connection time, listen, show genuine interest and don't overreact, there is more of a chance that they will continue to confide in you. They won't confide in you about everything but this is a very important part of their development. If you appear too judgemental, they will hold back information.
Do use positively-framed language. For example, instead of saying 'You're so lazy, get that homework done', try 'When the homework is done, you can watch that show on Netflix/TV.'	**Don't** blame them automatically for any bad reports/notes/results - be positively curious first.	Positive reinforcement works. If there is something that is concerning you, approach it with a positive and caring attitude as you may have more success this way rather than criticising. There is a balance to be found between motivating and demotivating your child.
Do help them to set realistic, short-term, **S.M.A.R.T.** targets for saving, holidays, projects, school work etc. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).	**Don't** put pressure on them for aspirational future goals.	Helping your child to achieve goals that they set for themselves empowers their self-belief, self-efficacy and self-management, and overall helps them to develop the skill of organising their own lives.

Do	Don't	Reasoning
Do remember what it was like for you as a teenager! Expect a lot of silent treatment. **Do** learn to stand back from an argument - pause and return to the subject, responding with a level head. **Do** negotiate new boundaries. **Do** reach out and connect with other parents/ guardians who are experiencing the same parenting stage.	**Don't** panic if they are disrespectful, rude or short-tempered, or when you get the silent treatment, eyerolls, deep sighs and/or hear doors slamming. **Don't** bombard them when they are in a bad mood. **Don't** let them push your buttons so you fall into the reaction trap. **Don't** be surprised if rules enforced without negotiation are received with eyerolls and objections. **Don't** think you are the only one experiencing these behaviours.	This too shall pass! Trying to remember our own teenage years will help you empathise with what your child is going through. Rudeness and short-temperedness are uncomfortable but a normal part of adolescence. Their brains are still under construction - some reactions are impulsive for the next few years. Reacting with the same attitude does not help. Consequence conversations are best had with a level head. Take time and respond in a calm assertive way. You are role modelling the best way to communicate. Highlight the boundaries. Teens need help getting back on track and respectful, open and honest conversation can help with this. Remember, you are not alone - find a kindred spirit in another parent in the same situation and support each other.
Do let them face the consequences in school for things they have forgotten or failed to do. **Do** reach out to a key teacher if you have concerns.	**Don't** be tempted to cover for them. **Don't** redirect the blame to someone else. **Don't** mention unhelpful negativity about the school or education in their company.	It is important to let your child mess up and stand to face the consequences; otherwise, as parents, we are doing our child a disservice by not empowering them to cope in the real world, to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions. Though it takes much strength, letting your child face the consequences of their decisions will allow them opportunities to grow, learn and advance their skills.
Do encourage them to exercise and eat well. Provide healthy snacks. Have family meals together where possible.	**Don't** ignore health or nag about food or exercise.	Teens of this age can begin to become body conscious and appetites can increase. For their overall wellbeing, it is important that they have access to lots of nutritious food and opportunity to exercise.
Do give them chores and responsibilities. **Do** encourage your child to view mistakes as opportunities to learn.	**Don't** make chores exclusively part of a punishment system. **Don't** rush to remove every obstacle or challenge.	Having chores to do allows young people to learn new skills and become more responsible for themselves. It also allows them more independence if they are getting a monetary allowance for chores that you might pay someone else to do. Overall, it is good for their wellbeing and skills development.

Do	Don't	Reasoning
Do start planning for their financial future. **Do** ask the school guidance counsellor about third-level costs. **Do** your research. Check out AIB Future Sparks Parents' Guide to Managing Money. **Do** talk openly about spending, saving and making choices with money. **Do** involve your child in simple discussions about budgeting and financial decisions.	**Don't** forget to keep the language around the progression to third-level or other such opportunities after secondary school positive and goal-focused. **Don't** treat money as a taboo topic. **Don't** assume financial skills are automatically learned through experience.	It is never too early to start planning for your child's future. Speak to your child about their interests and monitor their abilities. Be open to all options. Your child will be most successful if they choose according to their interests and abilities. Looking into the cost of this now is wise; look at the various third-level financial supports out there. Developing healthy money habits starts early. Understanding needs versus wants, goal-setting and informed decision-making can help young people become financially confident adults.



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