

**Dear Counselling Corner:**

What advice do you have for helping parents and senior elementary (Grade 5) students transition to middle school day to day logistics? We are in the process of trying to give some freedom and teach responsibility so they can transition to middle school independence, but it's a big jump for many kids and families. We are trying to focus on independently having to get ready, leave the house, and get to and from school themselves, and some on public transit too. Also, what about staying home alone? Is there a recommended age, time, tips, and tricks to help families? Thank you.

**Mom and Dad raising future independent teens**

**Dear Mom and Dad:**

I love that you're already thinking ahead to fostering increasing independence, which is HUGELY important for middle schoolers and something that came up a lot when I was a school counsellor at that level.

Elementary and middle school staff are in the process of planning for that transition which involves connecting with each other and organizing Grade 5s to visit their catchment middle school for some planned activities. This visit gives Gr. 5 students a chance to see what their new school looks like and get a feel for it, as well as minimizing some of the (expected and normal) stress or anxiety that kids feel when they are preparing to move to a new environment. If your child will not be attending their catchment school, please reach out to the administrators of the middle school or program that your child will be attending so you can organize a visit.

As a parent, you might also want to take some trips to the upcoming school's grounds and walk around, visit the playground, etc.

If your child will be walking to and from school, start getting familiar with that walk before the transition to middle school even happens! You can start by walking together, maybe inviting friends who will be walking with them (if applicable), and then having them walk on their own (you can always follow at a distance or track them using a phone GPS the first couple of times, if that makes you feel more comfortable). And if your child will be taking public transportation to and/or from school, this is even more important. Start getting familiar with where to go and wait for the bus, how to pay, and where to get off. You can take the lead in the beginning, and then slowly have them take over and then do this themselves, so they feel comfortable and confident once September rolls around. If they have friends they will be going with, have them practice together!

In terms of getting them to start taking ownership of getting ready and leaving the house, you can start that process now! Get them an alarm clock so they can start being responsible for getting up in the morning. I would advise that you NOT make use of the alarm on a phone, because I always encourage parents to keep phones out of kids' bedrooms overnight (it leads to

a decreased amount and/or quality of sleep). Work with your child to set up a schedule. Maybe work backwards from the time they need to leave. For example, if they need to be at the front door, shoes on, by 8:15am, and it takes them 45 minutes to get ready and have breakfast once they are up, make sure the alarm is set for at least 50 minutes prior to 8:15am. Every family and child will have a different routine, so this will vary between households.

In terms of staying home alone, there is technically no official legal age in BC (as far as I know), but there was a Supreme Court of BC decision that stated that kids under 10 should not be left at home alone. My best advice? Enroll your child in a babysitting course to help them become more independent and learn and adopt safe practices when it comes to staying home by themselves. Many middle schools will offer (for a fee) a baby-sitting course throughout the year, but you may want to get a jump on that before that.

Here are some links that provide some information and tips for fostering independence.

Some great websites:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/development/social-emotional-development/independence-in-teens>

[https://www.momjunction.com/articles/tips-to-make-your-teenager-independent\\_00327305/](https://www.momjunction.com/articles/tips-to-make-your-teenager-independent_00327305/)

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/life-skills-your-teen-needs-to-be-independent-2609033>

I know that this transition is challenging for kids, but it's also challenging for caregivers as they start having to adjust their own involvement and expectations. Be kind to yourself and make sure you're also taking care of your own needs. Hopefully you have friends who have been through or are going through this stage with their kids or have others you can talk to about it. Best of luck!

If you wish to meet with me or if you have concerns about your child and would like to access my services, please email me at [hchang@sd43.bc.ca](mailto:hchang@sd43.bc.ca).

*The Counselling Corner is intended to offer some helpful ideas, encouragement, and insight on a variety of topics to support your child's social and emotional learning.*

**Harriette Chang**  
**School Counsellor**