

## **The Art of Making Friends - Summer 2005**

### **The Jewish News**

Secondary transfer can be a worrying time for children – and their parents. But you can help ease your child's concerns.

We all worry about things in life that we can't control and we all want to know what's going to happen before it's actually happened. For a lot of children, the impending day of starting at secondary school is an event about which they would like to know the outcome in advance. And I guess as parents we would like to know too. After all, it's a big step moving from, say, Rosh Pinah to JFS.

It is a very anxious time for both parties. Not so much now, but as we near the end of August some parents will hear more about their child having headaches, stomach ache and being unable to sleep – all symptoms of stress. A doctor friend of mine confirmed that he sees more children with headaches in September than at any other time of the year.

Our anxieties are the same as that of the child – how will they cope with being a small fish in a large pond? Will all the issues they had overcome in junior school resurface in secondary school? No matter what their experience last year, there will always be a part of us wondering what September will bring. Will they be bullied again? Will they be able to cope with the workload? When they have been used to doing one piece of homework a night, will they be able to do three? Will they be able to organise themselves and get the bus on time?

Our children have additional worries: if I get into trouble, will I get detention? Will I like the people in my class and will they like me? Children worry about friendships a lot. In year six, friendships and best friends may have changed as children discover who they will be going to school with the next year.

Making friends is scary and we appreciate that. To help them lower their anxiety, we can ask them when they last made a new friend, what did they say to them, how did they make friends? What did they have in common? Ask them what they could say to someone they don't know when starting school, what questions could they ask them to see if they have anything in common, what kind of person would they approach and so on. What would they look like? By asking these types of questions you are taking them into the situation and getting them to think aloud. Join in the "game" and throw in a few suggestions if they run out of ideas.

If your child is not too confident, you could practice with them how they can make small talk and then see if they can use some helpful phrases/questions with someone they have not met before, where they can practise them safely. If your child does not think he has much to offer in the way of friendship then get him to write down 10 qualities he has and explain to him he has these for life and therefore has lots to offer.

If your child is overconfident and friends have shied away from him or her in the past, ask why they think this has happened and tactfully explain that sometimes people give out too much information too soon and frighten potential friends away. Even children need their personal space.