

Dr. Kay,

I am about to start high school and I am stressed about it. I hear so many horror stories about all sorts of things. My dad even told me about swirlies, where they stick your head in a toilet and flush it. How do I survive high school? How do I get out of the swirly?

- Helen

You really don't have much to worry about. Swirlies are actually pretty uncommon. But here are some tips to help you start high school on the right foot.

Lunch

There is one stressful situation many freshmen report. Lunch can be chaotic, so here's the trick. The first week, go to lunch just a couple of minutes late. Look for your friends when you get there, and join their table. If you don't take this advice, you might suffer long-term irreversible consequences; you might get stuck at a table where you have no friends. Once you choose a table, it's surprisingly hard to switch. The people you're leaving will feel like you're abandoning them. They feel that you 'now hate them'. And now they hate you back. Joining in on a table that is already formed is tough, too, because friends have jockeyed for positions next to certain people and you're interfering with that hierarchy.

A few other tips related to lunch . . . if you're worried about getting your meal, bring your lunch with you. Speaking of bags, Vera Bradley is fine, paper is even better, but leave the lunch box (and your orthodontic retainer) at home.

A New Routine

The transition from middle to high school involves change and change is stressful. High school starts much earlier, the work is harder, and there's more of it. To avoid stressful mornings, get everything ready for school the night before. Organize your homework. Get your book bag ready to go at the door (backpacks with wheels are 8th grade, get a standard one). Lay out your clothes. Look through your calendar at the next couple of days to make sure that you aren't procrastinating on assignments. Make sure that you have completed all of your homework. Having your homework done relieves stress, helps your grade, and prepares you for the upcoming tests. To keep assignments organized, you'll need one spot to write down all of your important things to do. Don't use a smart phone; they aren't allowed out during class time. A calendar or agenda book will work great. As for getting the work done, find a specific time and place to complete your homework. During the scheduled time, turn the phone off, and make sure you sit where you can't see the TV. When I say phone off, I mean really off. It's too tempting to find out who is thinking of you with each text to your inbox.

Get a Healthy Start

If I have to give you these next pieces of advice, then you were probably raised by wolves. Eat breakfast. Eat lunch. Don't use illegal drugs or get drunk. Without the proper food in your belly, you won't perform at your best. You won't be able to function in class at 100%. If you think missing a meal will bring down

your average. Doing drugs can ruin even a great student's performance and chances of getting into college. Getting high will permanently alter the earning potential as an adult. A few moments of "a cheap vacation" will cost you dearly. If you think that you can handle a little partying, you're wrong. Even if the effects aren't obvious right away, there are effects and they aren't good.

Have a Good Sense of Your Strengths

Yeah, your teeth might be too big and your hair a mess. No one is perfect. Everyone has insecurities and feel that they have some sort of character flaw. Don't be so hard on yourself. The sooner you realize that your "flaw" is simply a part of your character, you'll feel better about yourself. If your friends can't accept you because of that small thing, they don't belong in your circle.

Plan for the Future Today

Let those character flaws shine in clubs and sports. When you choose a club, look toward the future. Ask yourself, would I be willing to take a leadership role in this organization? Could I run for an officer position? Joining a club is fine, but colleges are looking for leaders. Universities want students who are well-rounded and have good grades. Run for one of the lower positions your first year joining. There are two ways of winning one of those spots, people in your club know and like you or you give a funny speech. Even if you become president of the knitting club (which is surprisingly popular with the boys), colleges will look at that as a leadership role and that you are a well-rounded student who deserves a place at their university. Some scholarships are based upon this type of involvement.

Drop the Drama

Unless you join the drama club, leave the drama at home, better yet your dad doesn't want it at home either, so drop the drama all-together. Social sites are great for adults who want to stay in touch with old friends and relatives, but you see your friends almost every day. If you need to talk with them, call them or wait until the next day. Social sites cater to the drama. Girls love to cyber-bully. They feel invincible behind a computer screen. Students send nasty messages over the computer and text messages that deliberately try to get you upset. Don't respond. Their intentions are to irritate you. When they don't get the reaction they were hoping for, they'll stop. Even though "everyone else" has a social media profile, you don't need one. Close it out and tell your friends that it got boring.

Keep Your Friends Close and Cut Out Frenemies

High school can be an exciting fun filled 4 – 5 years of your life. You will be bored if you simply complete the classwork. You have the potential of becoming anything. You can be whoever you want to be. You could be the sports nut supporter who goes to all of the games. You could be the A student who earns college credit their junior and senior year (11th and 12th grade). You could be the president of your senior class (if people know you or you can give a funny speech). Be outgoing. Be friendly. Since multiple middle schools are merging into one big school, you have plenty of people to choose as friends. And if you want to drop your old friends, it's never too late to cut ties with friends you don't like. If you have a "frenemy," someone who isn't that great of a friend, stop pretending and break off the communication.

If dropping out of sight doesn't work, be gently honest. "I have nothing against you but it seems like our lives are moving in different directions. If it's OK with you, I think that we should simply end our friendship."

Review of Tips

To relieve your stress, find a routine. The school is full of routine. We even have bells to tell you when to stand up and when to sit down. Once you set up a routine for yourself – when you wake up, shower, eat breakfast, get to school, go to your locker, eat lunch, go home, complete homework (phone and TV free), get ready for the next day, and turn out the light at a specific time – you will live stress free. Or at least you won't have too much stress to handle . . . unless on the first day of school, you sit at the wrong table during lunch, which should be your only concern. Sit at the wrong table, you might be the out-cast but it won't end in a swirly.

If you have a question about your child's attendance at school, feel that your child refuses to go to school, or have a question about your child's education, you can Email me at DrJimK@yahoo.com and your question with my answer may be published in this magazine.