



# THE NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS' GUIDE TO STARTING HIGH SCHOOL

ADVICE & REASSURANCE FROM  
MENTORS WHO GET IT

## HELLO THERE!

We are part of a support network in Australia called I CAN Network. We mentor autistic and other neurodivergent kids in schools and online, to think 'I CAN'.

Like each of you, each of us has a brain that learns and processes things differently than 'typical brains'.

We decided to create this guide because we want you to know that you are definitely not alone.

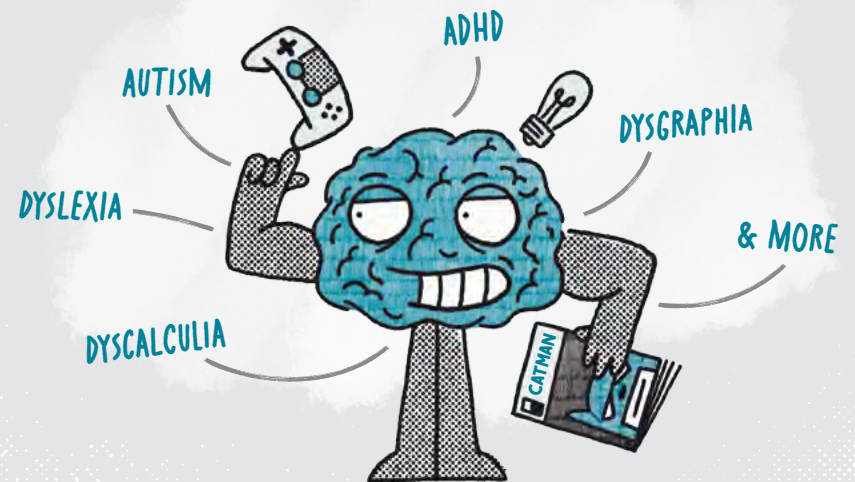
We have some tips and encouragement we'd like to share - all things we WISH we had known before we started Year 7!

If you like this guide, you can find even more helpful stuff (including details about our online groups) via the QR code on the back.

“ HI EVERYONE! WHEN I THINK BACK TO STARTING YEAR 7, WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN SUPER HELPFUL FOR ME IS IF I HAD OLDER PEERS WHO I COULD RELATE TO, WHO WOULD ASSURE ME THAT I COULD JUST BE MYSELF, AND REMIND ME TO ASK FOR HELP WHEN I NEEDED IT. WE HOPE YOU FIND THIS GUIDE USEFUL. WHO KNOWS ...IN A COUPLE OF YEARS YOU MIGHT BE GIVING YOUR TIPS TO THE NEXT GROUP OF NEW YEAR 7s.

”

CHRIS VARNEY – FOUNDER/CEO, I CAN NETWORK



**NEURODIVERGENT BRAINS =  
DIFFERENT, DEFINITELY NOT LESS!**



# HIGH SCHOOL VERSUS PRIMARY SCHOOL

THERE ARE A LOT OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL. SOME CAN BE REALLY EXCITING BUT OTHERS MAY SEEM A BIT MUCH AT FIRST. DON'T WORRY - THERE ARE LOTS OF PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU WITH THESE CHANGES.

## SOME (NOT ALL) OF THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCES MAY INCLUDE:

- Timetabling - typically in high school, you will have a different set of classes each day rather than the exact same schedule.
- Multiple classrooms - students typically have to move around from class to class for each subject (and often have different teachers for each subject, too!).
- Being around more people (but this also gives you more chances to find those you may get along with!).

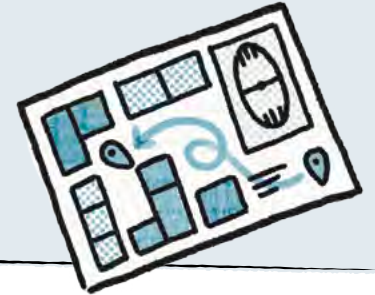
PERIOD TIMES	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9:00-9:50					
10:00-10:50					
RECESS 10:50-11:30					
11:30-12:30					
12:30-1:30					
LUNCH 1:30-2:00					
2:00-3:00					
3:00-2:00					

## BEFORE THE FIRST DAY

Type up a few things that you want your teachers to know about you to make you more comfortable in class.



Get a map of the school from the school website (or do a Google search) and review it beforehand.



Practise the route to school (how long it takes, public transport needs, etc.).

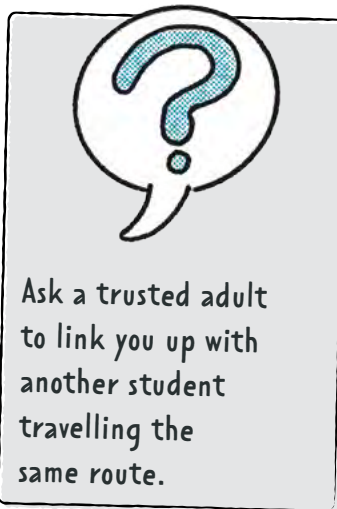
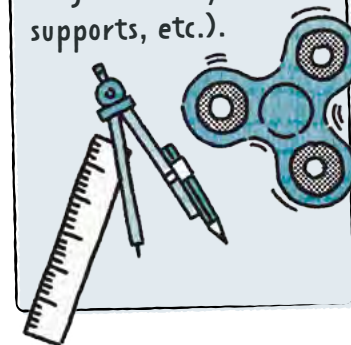


Plan to meet up with someone if there's another student you already feel comfortable with.



Test out your shoes / uniform for comfort.

Buy and organise your core school items (stationery packs, fidgets/sensory supports, etc.).



Ask a trusted adult to link you up with another student travelling the same route.

# IT REALLY IS **OKAY** TO NEED HELP

MANY OF US REMEMBER FEELING AFRAID OR EMBARRASSED TO ASK QUESTIONS OR ASK FOR HELP DURING THE START OF HIGH SCHOOL. LOOKING BACK NOW, WE REALISE THAT IF WE HAD ASKED FOR HELP FROM THE BEGINNING, IT WOULD HAVE MADE OUR TIME IN HIGH SCHOOL EVEN EASIER AND MORE POSITIVE. HERE ARE SOME THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU.

- Nearly everyone needs support in one way or another to feel comfortable in high school.
- Some students will need more support than others, and that's okay!
- It is always better to ask for help than to stress on your own (trust us on this!).
- If you are ever unsure about something, it's important to ask questions (as cheesy as it sounds, "There's no such thing as a silly question!").



## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR GETTING HELP

Reach out to your Year 7 coordinator if you have any questions, especially in the early days when you are still getting to know your new teachers.



Virtually every school will have a process (including "designated quiet spaces") to support students who are overwhelmed. Your parents or carers can work with you and your school to make sure you know how to get help.

If you are uncomfortable approaching a teacher or staff member directly, you can always write down your questions or send a message online.



Let your parents or carers know if you have questions or worries. It's also okay to get their help in reaching out to teachers and staff at school.





# MEETING NEW PEOPLE

A BIG PART OF HIGH SCHOOL INVOLVES MEETING AND INTERACTING WITH A LOT OF PEOPLE. IT'S NATURAL TO FEEL A BIT NERVOUS. HERE ARE SOME THINGS WE WISH WE HAD KNOWN BACK WHEN WE WERE IN YOUR SHOES!

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

Everybody else is also meeting lots of new people.

You don't have to find your "best friends" straight away. It's also okay to take some time to find people you can relate to.

There are many different places where you'll meet people who might become your close friends - in your classes, during lunch time, or even at clubs and events!

Trust us...

## BEING YOURSELF

is the best way to find people who you genuinely connect with.

## WHEN STARTING A NEW SCHOOL THERE ARE LOTS OF NEW FACES AND NAMES

It's okay if it takes some time for you to remember them.

## A FEW CONVERSATION STARTERS ("ICEBREAKERS")

Talk about something that happened in a class you shared.

Asking "Hey, can you tell me your name again?" if you've forgotten someone's name.

Bring up interests the other person has mentioned previously (in class, during orientation, etc.).

## SHARED INTERESTS ARE A GREAT WAY TO MEET PEOPLE

Carry something that displays your interests (for instance, a pencil case that shows a game you play, band you follow, sport team you barrack for).



Join a school club - clubs tend to be very inclusive and allow people to connect over shared interests.

“ONCE I BECAME MORE COMFORTABLE JUST BEING MYSELF, I WAS ABLE TO FIND SOME PEOPLE WHO LIKED ME FOR ME.”

# ORGANISING STUFF FOR CLASS

All of the books, notebooks and handouts can feel overwhelming at first but if you keep them organised it's less difficult to manage, such as.



Using a zip-up binder for each core subject.



Colour-coding your books and timetable to help remember which things go with which subject (for example: blue = Maths, yellow = English).



Having a list of what to bring for each class.

- A digital timetable or weekly calendar can be very helpful to keep track of homework and assessments once they start.
- If your school has lockers, these are a great place to store things (books, laptop charger) so you don't have to remember to bring them to and from school (plus you can decorate lockers with a few of your favourite things!).
- On the night before school, pack up the things you need for class the next day - it cuts down on stress in the morning!

# GOING BETWEEN CLASSES

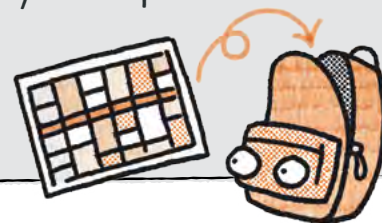
It can take time to navigate a new place and your teachers will appreciate that!



If you are lost, look for other people in your class or ask an adult for help (hint: the library and front office are typically staffed at all times).



Laminate a small copy of your colour-coded timetable to keep in your pocket or pencil case. Keep a colour-coded school map handy in your backpack, too!



Ear defenders (such as loops or noise-cancelling headphones) can be super helpful to soften some of the noise in the hallways.





# FEELING COMFORTABLE IN THE CLASSROOM

## TAKING BREAKS DURING CLASS

THERE MIGHT BE TIMES WHEN YOU NEED TO LEAVE THE CLASSROOM FOR A BREAK. YOUR TEACHER OR YOUR SCHOOL MIGHT HAVE SPECIFIC DIRECTIONS ABOUT THIS.

Here are some things you need to find out from your teacher or school well beforehand – your parents or carers can help with this and make sure you have all this information in advance.



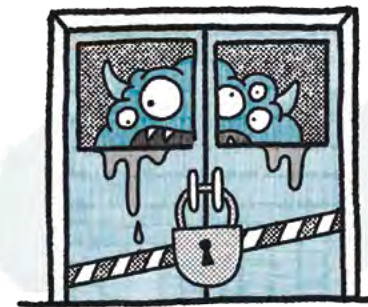
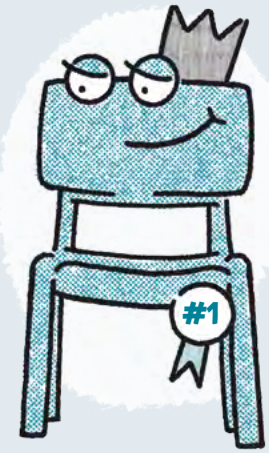
How do you have to communicate needing a break? (For example, raise your hand, give a card to your teacher, just leave).

Is there a designated quiet space or wellbeing area, and if so, where is it?



## PICKING YOUR SEAT IN CLASS

- If you think you might need breaks during class, it can be good to sit on the side (near an aisle) and / or at the back.
- If you are easily distracted, sitting in the front row can be helpful. This allows you to be upfront near the teacher but still near an exit if you need to leave the classroom.



Where are you allowed to go during your break? (For example, bathroom, hallway, yard, designated quiet space, wellbeing area).

How will you find out what you missed in class while you are gone? (For example, send an email, meet with teacher after school).



How will you be able to meet your sensory needs in class (For example, be encouraged to stretch if you need to, sketch in your notepad, use fidgets and/or fidgeting with paper, pencils, etc.).



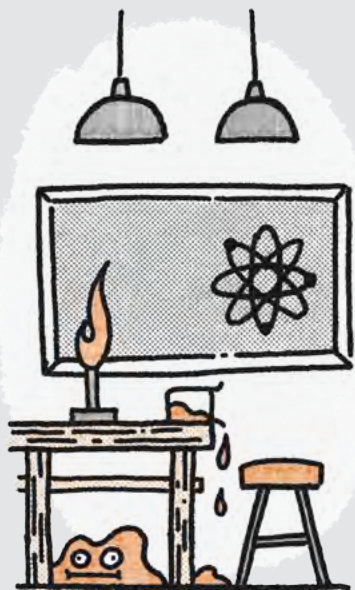
# NAVIGATING LUNCH TIME

IF YOU'RE FEELING A BIT LOST DURING LUNCH TIME, ESPECIALLY DURING THOSE INITIAL DAYS, REMEMBER IT IS THERE FOR YOU TO HAVE A BREAK AND RELAX. BELOW WE HAVE SOME IDEAS FOR PLACES YOU CAN GO AND THINGS TO DO IF YOU ARE UNCERTAIN.

## PLACES TO GO

### QUIET SPACES

Most schools will have specific sensory friendly and quiet spaces available. These can be great options if you're overwhelmed during lunch.



### LUNCH TIME CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES

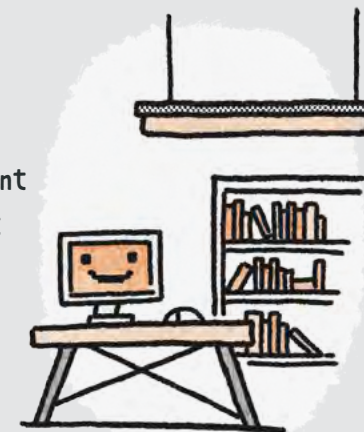
Clubs will often start up at lunch time as Term 1 gets underway. These can be a great way to meet other people who share your interests or for you to learn about a whole new subject.

“HANDBALL IS A GREAT WAY TO BURN OFF ENERGY AT LUNCH. IT'S FUN AND DOESN'T REQUIRE A LOT OF TALKING!”

“IN YEAR 7, I STARTED GOING TO THE LIBRARY AT LUNCH TO QUIETLY SKETCH AND RECHARGE. I ENDED UP MEETING OTHER PEOPLE WHO LOVED ANIME AS MUCH AS I DO!”

### LIBRARY

Libraries are usually a quieter environment where you can relax, participate in quiet activities, or get your homework done!



### GYM / SPORTS FIELD

If you enjoy games or sport, there are almost always activities that are open for anyone to join.





# WHAT IF I GET OVERWHELMED AT SCHOOL?

SOMETIMES THE EXCITEMENT AND CHANGES DURING THE FIRST FEW WEEKS OF SCHOOL CAN CAUSE US TO FEEL OVERWHELMED. THIS IS VERY COMMON AND YOU ARE NOT ALONE IF THIS HAPPENS TO YOU. GOING TO A DESIGNATED QUIET AND SAFE SPACE ON CAMPUS CAN HELP YOU IF YOU BECOME OVERWHELMED.

IT'S VERY HELPFUL TO KNOW WHERE THESE SPACES ARE WELL BEFORE YOU MIGHT NEED THEM (SO BE SURE TO ASK YOUR YEAR COORDINATOR OR HAVE YOUR PARENTS OR CARERS ASK RIGHT AWAY!).

## OTHER THINGS THAT CAN HELP



Deep breathing



Stimming



Accessing something that brings you comfort (fidget toy, picture of your pet, etc.)



Drink some water

# PACING YOURSELF

HIGH SCHOOL CAN BE A BIG ADJUSTMENT SO IT'S IMPORTANT TO PACE YOURSELF. PACING YOURSELF MEANS BEING KIND TO YOURSELF AND GIVING YOURSELF TIME TO RECHARGE FROM ALL OF THE CHANGES GOING ON.

During the transition to high school, it can be helpful to maintain free time after school to recharge as you settle into the new school routine.



Engaging in your interests - whether it's drawing, video games, sports, singing or something else - can be a great way to recharge.

If you need quiet time after school that's okay and it's important to let yourself have this time.



Take care of your sensory needs (For instance, through fidgets, stimming, calming activities, etc.).

Reach out to your parents, carers or other trusted adults if you are feeling overloaded with schoolwork or other pressures.

# MESSAGES FOR NEW YEAR 7s

BEFORE YEAR 7 BEGINS, WE HAVE A FEW MORE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM NEURODIVERGENT MENTORS WHO REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE IN YOUR SHOES!

“IT’S TEMPTING TO ACT DIFFERENTLY TO YOUR NORMAL SELF TO FIT IN WITH THOSE AROUND YOU, BUT THAT’S TIRING AND NOT SUSTAINABLE. BE YOURSELF. IF PEOPLE LIKE WHO YOU ARE, THEY’LL BE BETTER FRIENDS.”

**WILLOW**

“NEVER EVER BE ASHAMED OR EMBARRASSED OF YOURSELF. TRUST YOUR GUT AND STAY TRUE TO WHO YOU ARE.”

**CYLAN**

“IT’S OKAY TO FEEL ANXIOUS ABOUT STARTING HIGH SCHOOL. BUT KNOW THAT DEEP DOWN, ALMOST EVERY OTHER STUDENT IS FEELING THE SAME WAY. WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.”

**RACHAEL**

“I KNOW THAT STARTING HIGH SCHOOL MAY FEEL LIKE A LOT TO PROCESS, BUT REMEMBER THAT YOU’RE NOT DOING IT ALONE. THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE THERE TO SUPPORT YOU ALONG THE WAY.”

**RYN**

“YOU ARE SO MUCH MORE CAPABLE THAN YOU MIGHT GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR. USE YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK, ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS AND JUST TAKE HIGH SCHOOL ONE DAY AT A TIME. BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN DO IT ...BECAUSE YOU CAN!”

**KYAL**

“HIGH SCHOOL MAY FEEL CHALLENGING AT FIRST, BUT EVERY LITTLE STEP ALONG THE WAY IS A VICTORY. IT WILL GET EASIER. YOU GOT THIS!”

**MAX**



**SCAN ME FOR  
MORE INFORMATION**



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**SCAN ME TO COMPLETE A  
2-QUESTION FEEDBACK SURVEY**



Department  
of Education

