



**Navigating
secondary
education:**
A guide for
parents in
years 7-9



Making the most of the early secondary years

There’s a lot of focus on the ‘jump’ up to secondary school and how intimidating it can be for some students, but we rarely discuss the practical elements of the Key Stage 3 years (years 7-9) and how to make the most of them in order to prepare for the infamous GCSE years.

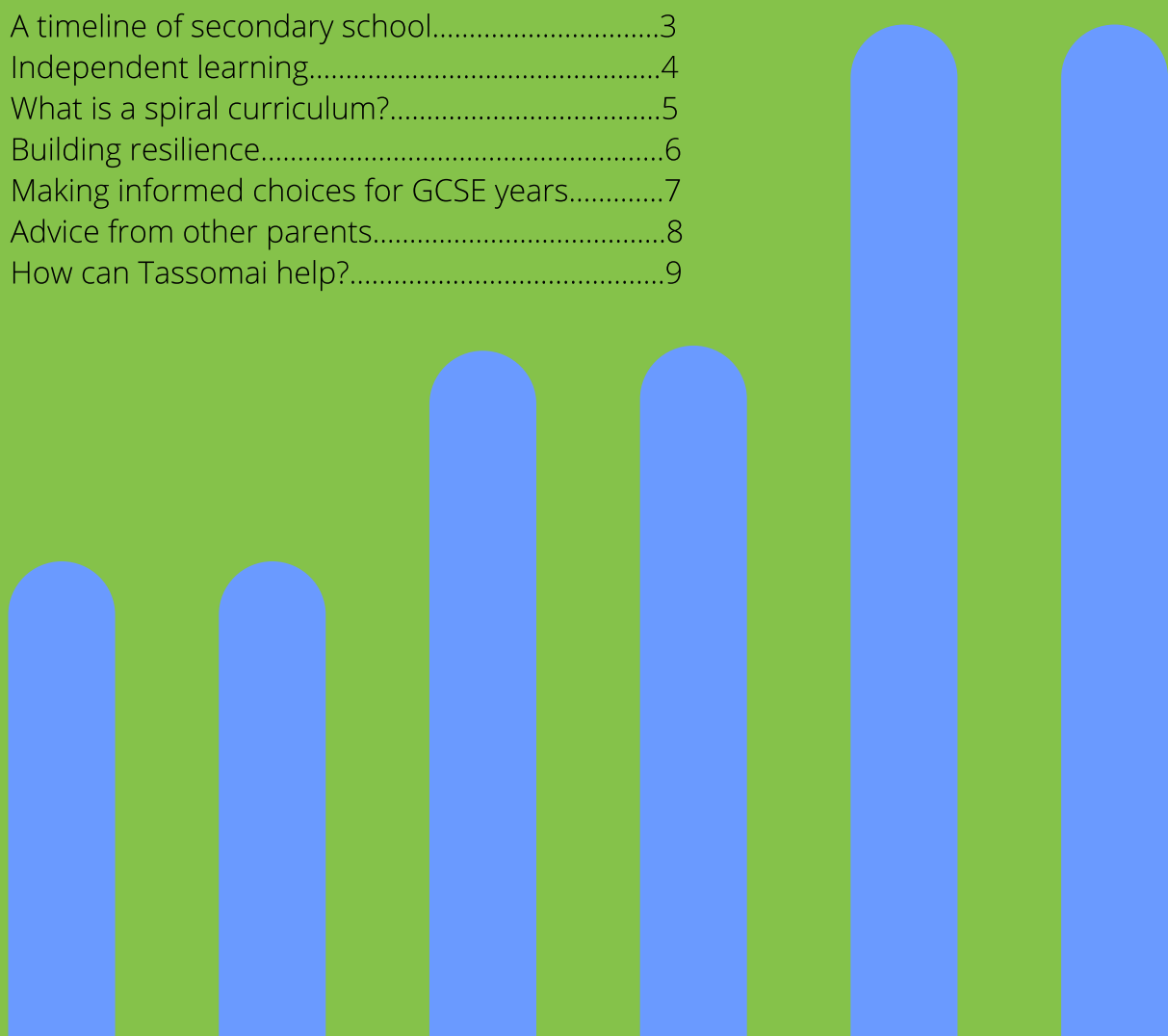
At their heart, the KS3 years are all about learning and embedding the skills that will be needed for exams in the future, but without the panic of them looming too close in the distance. This makes KS3 a brilliant place for students to learn *how* to learn and it’s a great time to pick up techniques that will help throughout their education.

For parents, this is a good time to build some solid habits with your child that will give them a good foundation for the years ahead and help them to feel confident in their learning for the time being.

Tassomai’s little-and-often approach helps to build confidence over time and support students’ learning as they grow and progress.

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A Timeline of Secondary Education

KS3

Year 7 (ages 11-12)

Getting used to the transition from primary to secondary and the introduction of a wide range of new subjects. This is the time for students to settle in, try new things and make friends.

Year 8 (ages 12-13)

Developing study habits and perfecting time management skills is a great way to set them up for success for the years to come. Year 8 has a lot of emphasis on thinking about the subjects they would like to choose for GCSE and ensuring they are confident in the basics for their core subjects (English, maths & science).

Year 9 (ages 13-14)

Some schools start studying GCSE content in year 9, whereas others prefer to continue perfecting students' foundational knowledge for an extra year instead. Whichever one your child's school chooses, year 9 brings a much bigger focus on academic development and progressing their education.

GCSE

Year 10 (ages 14-15)

This year marks the official start of GCSE learning and specialising in their chosen subjects. Having a good routine is key to mastering the intensive exam preparation that begins in this year, so make sure your child has developed some good habits in previous years to help them through.

Year 11 (ages 15-16)

GCSEs! This will be the focus of their entire year with terminal exams waiting for them in the summer. Good preparation in the earlier years will help to ease the difficulty of starting the revision process and help them to keep focused - the goal is in sight!

Independent Learning

Independent learning is a vital skill for students of all ages, but one that starts to become particularly important in KS3. This is the prime time for students to start taking responsibility for their own education by setting goals, managing their time, and seeking out resources on their own.

Here are just some of the reasons that parents should try to encourage independent learning when their child is in KS3:



1. **Future education**

It helps to prepare students not only for GCSEs, but vocational courses, A-levels, degrees and the workplace.



2. **Critical thinking**

Students have to learn to solve problems on their own and analyse their own mistakes in order to improve and make progress.



3. **Time management**

Learning to juggle their timetable effectively and allocate time to each of their subjects, as well as any extracurricular activities and homework, teaches them how to prioritise.



4. **Motivation**

Taking ownership of their work forces them to take the initiative and pursue their own goals, which gives them a greater sense of achievement and a more positive attitude towards learning, rather than simply following instructions.

What is a Spiral Curriculum?

KS3 is all about learning and relearning concepts to make sure that students have a solid foundation in the basics that will be built on over the years to come.

A Spiral Curriculum is an approach to education that focuses on revisiting and slowly but continuously building on previously learned concepts over time.

Here are some of the key characteristics of a spiral curriculum:

- Repetition
Reviewing and revisiting concepts is key to ensuring this foundational knowledge is solid
- Progression
Additional levels of complexity can slowly be added through this method so that students keep developing their understanding
- Active learning
When knowledge is built on slowly it helps students to be confident in their understanding and remain engaged with their learning rather than struggling with a new concept when they're thrown in the deep end.
- Continuous feedback
The best way to ensure this foundational knowledge stays embedded in a student's memory is to keep recalling it and testing it even as you move onto other topics - this is where Tassomai comes in to help students maintain that background level of understanding.
- Long-term retention
Spiral curriculums are all about retaining knowledge long-term rather than cramming for a test, so revisiting topics with your child is a great way to ensure that they will commit their syllabus to memory and be able to recall it far into the future.



Building Resilience

Secondary education requires students to have a level of mental resilience against the stresses and strains they are bombarded with, but they are rarely taught how they can develop these skills. Learning to pick yourself back up again after a failure doesn't always come naturally - it's its own kind of art form and requires practice just like everything else, without it students are much more likely to burnout and get overwhelmed.

Sam Clark, teacher and author of 'What They Don't Teach You in School', told us there are five practical steps that help build resilience in children:

1. Openness

Developing an environment where children feel confident to talk openly.

2. Emotions

Building an emotional vocabulary, so that children understand a range of emotions outside of the 'big four': happy, sad, jealous, angry.

3. Failure

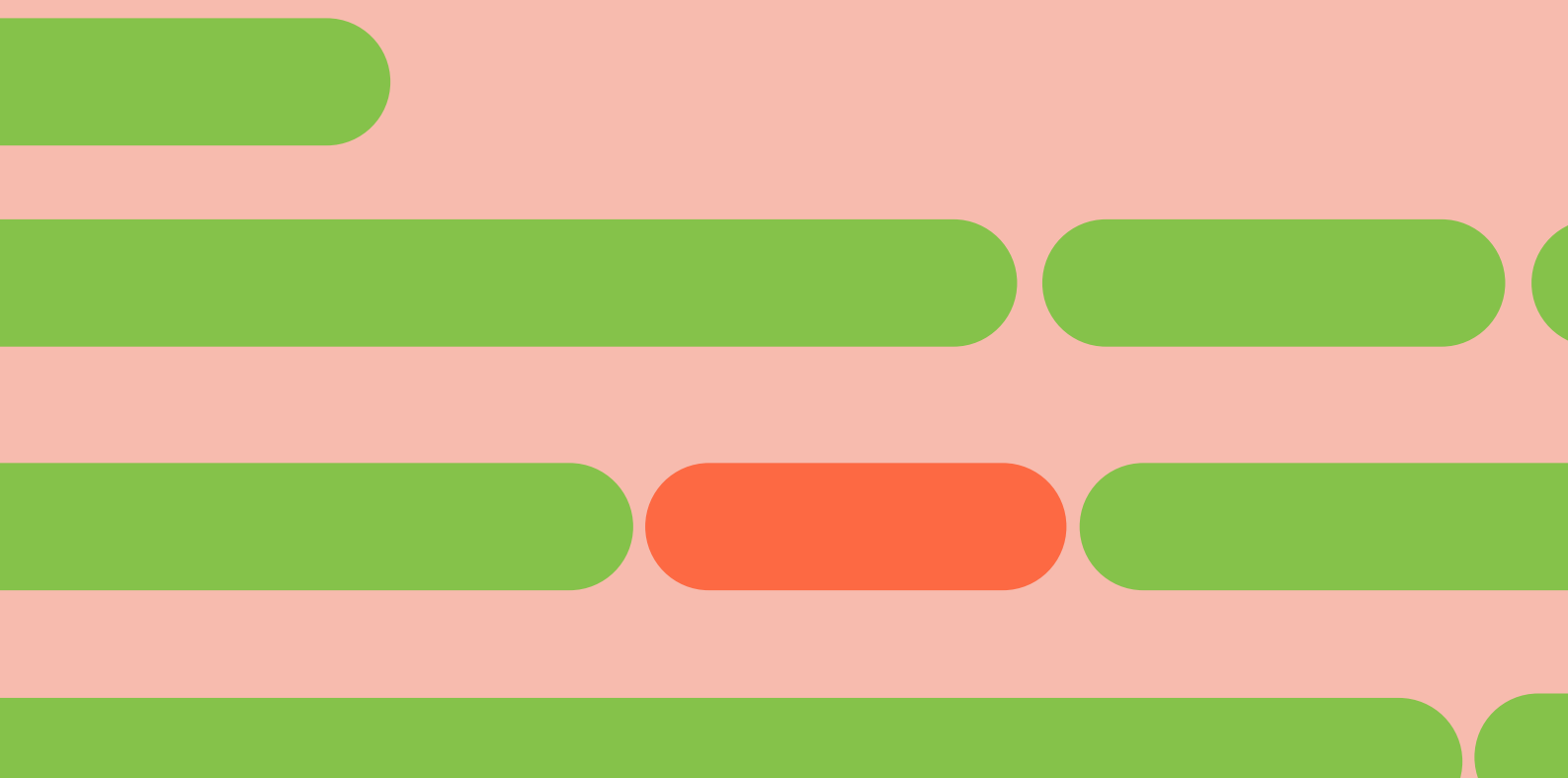
Letting your child know that failure can be the first step to success.

4. Other people

Teaching your child about healthy boundaries and how to respond without being dragged into the emotional reactions of others.

5. Taking responsibility

Learning how to respond to making mistakes is key to becoming emotionally resilient.



Making Informed Choices for GCSEs

Helping your child to make informed choices about their GCSE subjects is crucial, as these choices can significantly impact their academic and career pathways. There are a few key things that you can do to help this process and make sure they make the correct choices for them:

1. **Start Early**

Begin discussing GCSE subject choices well in advance. Give your child ample time to research, consider options, and consult with their teachers.

2. **Interests and Strengths**

Encourage your child to reflect on their interests, hobbies, and passions. They may have a future career in mind already or may want to keep their options open, either way it's good to align their choices with these goals from the outset with GCSE subjects.

3. **Balance and Diversity**

Having a balanced curriculum, which includes a mix of academic and creative subjects, is a good way for your child to explore different avenues if they aren't certain about what they would like to do in the future.

4. **Assess Workload and Commitment**

Discuss the level of commitment and workload associated with each subject with your child, as some subjects may be more demanding than others. Consider extracurricular activities and hobbies to ensure your child can manage their time effectively.

5. **Stay Open-Minded and Supportive**

Be open to your child's interests and goals, even if they differ from your own expectations. Encourage your child to take subjects they are passionate about, as this can lead to better motivation and performance.

Remember that the final decision should be your child's, based on their interests, abilities, and aspirations. They will be grateful for your guidance and support in making an informed decision.



Advice From Other Parents

"You can spend the first 6 months to a year of secondary school settling in and learning to enjoy it, but KS3 is a lot less nurturing after the support of primary school. It's worth keeping an eye on how they're doing because they can quietly become quite disaffected with school and this feeling can creep up on them, and you.

"The progression that teachers start to focus on in the secondary school years is all about taking A-levels and completing a degree. My son has really found his feet now that he is at college and studying site carpentry - it's lit a fire in him and he's so switched on in a way that I've not seen since he was at primary. The path isn't the same for every student."

- Mark, parent to college student

"The relationship you have with their teachers at primary school is never the same once they're at secondary school, but in my experience they still do their best to help and can provide great support. Always reach out to your child's teacher if you think they're struggling with a subject. They usually have additional resources to recommend or can give them targeted areas to work on at home. My son's teachers really helped us to get his learning back on track."

- Mhairi, parent to a year 12 student

"The thing that helped my family the most was to have visual reminders of what my daughter was doing at school around the house so that we all kept up with each other's schedules. This can be as simple as having a copy of her timetable on the fridge so that we could ask her about the classes she had that day. Being able to ask her more specific questions about her school life made it much easier to keep her talking to me, rather than asking 'how was school' and getting little in return."

- Julie, parent to year 11 student



How Tassomai can Help with Exam Stress

Students preparing for exams often display very similar characteristics, whether they bury their head and ignore their work or try to cram at the last second before a test.

Tassomai is based around the principle of **little-and-often** revision, encouraging students to reinforce strengths and target any weaknesses with personalised daily quizzes.

This approach is scientifically proven to help embed knowledge and increase long-term fact retention, but it also has the added benefit of reducing student stress levels.

Opting for quick, targeted daily quizzing throughout the school year gives students a constant background level of knowledge and revision, which reduces the need for frantic revision and sets them up for success!

Find out more about how Tassomai can help your child [here](#).



The Learning Program

www.tassomai.com