

saint mary's press

9<sup>TH</sup> Grade

SURVIVAL  
GUIDE

**Chris Wardwell**

# 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

# SURVIVAL

# GUIDE



**Chris Wardwell**

Saint Mary's Press®

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Basilian Fathers (Congregation of Saint Basil), who educated me for over seventeen years of my life and with whom I have worked for the past nine years. No amount of thanks could ever repay my indebtedness to them. I am forever grateful.

It is also dedicated to my son, Jacob, for taking care of Mom and our dog Delilah when I stayed late at work so many nights to write this book, and to my best friend and wife, Christine, for her patience and support.

The publishing team included Steven C. McGlaun, development editor; Lorraine Kilmartin, reviewer; prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the prepublication and production services departments of Saint Mary's Press.

Interior illustrations by Victoria Shuck.

Copyright © 2007 by Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320, [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org). All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

3453

ISBN 978-0-88489-966-2, Print  
ISBN 978-1-59982-197-9, Digital

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wardwell, Chris.

9th grade survival guide / Chris Wardwell.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-88489-966-2 (pbk.)

1. High school students—Conduct of life. 2. High school students—Religious life. 3. Catholic high school students—Conduct of life. 4. Catholic high school students—Religious life. I. Title. II. Title: Ninth grade survival guide.

BJ1661.W325 2007

248.8'3—dc22

2006028022

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> . . . . .	6
<b>I. Facing Your Fears.</b> . . . . .	9
Hazing, Seniors, and Being Picked On . . . . .	15
I Will Not Have Any Friends or Fit In . . . . .	22
I Will Get Lost . . . . .	29
I Will Make a Fool of Myself . . . . .	34
<b>II. Things That Might Surprise You.</b> . . . . .	61
So Many Options, So Little Time . . . . .	43
You Are Not Alone . . . . .	49
High School: Easier Than You Think . . . . .	54
Take Advantage of Help . . . . .	61
<b>III. Catholic School Confidential</b> . . . . .	67
Leading Prayer on a Moment's Notice . . . . .	73
Mass Mysteries: Sitting, Standing, Responding . . . . .	81
What Is Up with These Retreats?. . . . .	87
Bible and Theology 101. . . . .	94
<b>IV. Dilemmas to Deal With</b> . . . . .	101
Drama! Rumors, Gossip, and Such . . . . .	107
Finding Your Right Fit. . . . .	114
Balancing School, Family, Friends, and Fun . . . . .	121
Finding True Friends . . . . .	127
Dealing with Disappointment . . . . .	133

<b>V. What Incoming Ninth Graders Should Know</b>	<b>139</b>
Prioritize, Prioritize, Prioritize . . . . .	142
Don't Go It Alone . . . . .	149
One Mistake Is Not the End of the World . . . . .	155
Curing the Cooties . . . . .	161
<b>VI. The Weebles in Your Life</b>	<b>167</b>
Understanding Your Parents . . . . .	173
Teachers Are Not All Alike . . . . .	179
Negotiating Peer Politics . . . . .	185
<b>VII. Things to Be Excited About</b>	<b>193</b>
Meeting New People . . . . .	197
Re-establishing Yourself . . . . .	203
More Interesting Studies . . . . .	209
More Independence . . . . .	215
<b>VIII. Gender-Specific Issues</b>	<b>221</b>
For Girls Only . . . . .	227
For Boys Only . . . . .	235
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>242</b>

---

# Foreword

## WARNING

Reading this book could make your transition into the high school life easier. Possible side effects include, but are not limited to, the following:

- standing out among your classmates due to increased self-confidence
- the ability to cope with and properly address crises when they arise
- effective communication with peers, teachers, and parents
- a deepened faith in God and the gifts he blessed you with

The *9th Grade Survival Guide* is designed to help you on the always exciting and sometimes scary move to high school. Each topic covered in this book was suggested by students just like you. Young men and women entering high school or recently completing their first year of high school met with us and told us all the things “they wish they had known.” Their knowledge and experience lie within the pages of this book, where you will read about obstacles, dilemmas, fears, surprises, and numerous other situations you might encounter as you roam the halls of your high school for the first time. Each section presents

not only a potential situation but also tips for handling that situation. Some of what you read in these pages will speak directly to what you are feeling, while parts of the book will present information that will come in handy somewhere down the road. Feel free to skip from section to section. As you read, take time to imagine yourself in the situation described and think about how you would respond.

Whether you are entering a private or a public high school, this book can make a valuable contribution to your first year. Not everything you need to know for success in high school is in this book. That would be impossible because the high school years are different for each person. What this book can offer you is a head start and the skills for facing the issues you will encounter. So whether school starts in one week, the first semester is halfway through, or high school is a year away, take advantage of the wisdom this book shares. Have courage and enjoy your high school experience!





Part I  
**Facing Your Fears**

---

---

“[Jesus] said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. . . . Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your life-span? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? If God so clothes the grass in the field . . . , will he not much more provide for you?” (Luke 12:22–28, NAB)

## **Fearing Fear Itself**

In his first inaugural address, United States president Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” That statement might make you wonder whether he was ever a ninth grader in high school! But there is some truth to what he said. The Gospels have many examples of Jesus telling people not to be afraid, and they were in much more dire circumstances than a ninth grader entering high school. In the Scripture passage above, Jesus reminds his disciples that they need not worry because God is with them. Keep these words in mind as you start your first days of high school.

## **Naming Your Fears**

Whether you want to admit it or not, a great deal of fear is generally associated with entering ninth grade. You are taking a step into the unknown, and most people

experience a degree of trepidation entering unfamiliar territory. This fear is not unique to you, nor is it unique to the experience of starting high school. If you were walking into an unfamiliar dark room, you might hesitate—a little fearfully—because you do not know what is in there. By turning on the lights, you can see and then deal with whatever is there. Part I is about turning on the lights and eliminating a few fears you might have about high school's unknowns.

High school seniors represent one of the biggest fears that incoming ninth graders have. Questions like “Will they pick on me?” or “Will I get hurt or have to go through embarrassing ordeals during any ninth-grade initiation activities?” may be flooding your mind right now. Do not worry! Yes, sometimes bad things happen, but they are in such a minority that it would be foolish to lose sleep over them. Compare your fear of seniors with some people’s worries about flying. These same people have no fear of riding in cars, although statistics show that people have a greater chance of being injured or killed in a car accident than in a plane crash. Worrying about abuse from seniors is similarly useless. You will soon read about some steps you can take to help avoid the wrath of a rare misguided senior.

The high school social scene is also a source of anxiety for newcomers. There is no sugarcoating of this subject on these pages—you will have to make some adjustments—but the experience can be far less traumatic if you handle situations with patience and care.

Most likely your high school has more people, bigger buildings, and a larger campus than your junior high

school. Compare the difference to driving in a big city rather than in a suburban neighborhood. You have more roads and more cars to deal with now, and you have to find a parking space at a location where you have never been. And if that weren't bad enough, everyone is driving bumper cars. Yours is a small but efficient economy car, but SUVs surround you. You have only five minutes to get to classes, and the halls resemble five o'clock traffic after every period. Again, try not to worry. This book has ideas to help you around traffic jams so you can get to class on time.

Almost everybody, young and old, has had some version of this dream: you're standing naked in front of a large group of people. This dream reveals the vulnerability everyone feels in certain situations, especially when thrust into a new chapter in their lives. One of the more conscious fears that incoming ninth graders have is similar to the dream: making fools of themselves in public. To be completely honest, making a fool of oneself is almost inevitable. This is true even for adults. It happens to everyone. Hopefully, it will not be a common occurrence for you. What is important to know is how to deal with the situation when you do commit a blunder. Part I includes ways to smooth over the occasional misstep.

## **What You Will Find in This Section**

Part I examines four fears that many incoming ninth graders have about high school. Even if these are not your particular fears, you'll find this section worth

reading because you will gain insight into what some of your classmates might go through, to say nothing of the valuable skills you'll learn to help you during your high school career and beyond. Here are the fears that Part I will help you overcome:

- Hazing, Seniors, and Being Picked On
- I Will Not Have Any Friends or Fit In
- I Will Get Lost
- I Will Make a Fool of Myself



As you enter high school life, protect your boundaries, keep safe, and don't be afraid to have some fun.

# Hazing, Seniors, and Being Picked On

And what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

(Micah 6:8)

## Situation

It's Monday morning, day one of NOW (Ninth-grader Orientation Week, also called Fish Week). Schools have a habit of coming up with cute acronyms, so you had better get used to it. Rumors about this week have been circulating among your classmates. Now it's here. During the first-day-of-school assembly, the principal announced in no uncertain terms that hazing would not be tolerated and that any incident would be dealt with swiftly and severely. Yet you are still nervous.

Ninth graders had been asked to go to the school cafeteria to meet their assigned seniors. Upon entering the school cafeteria, you are handed a goofy-looking beanie with a spinning propeller on top. The word *FISH* is emblazoned on the front. Next, someone hands you the name of the senior who will be responsible for your well-being for the next week. Your pulse quickens. Then a teacher directs you toward a group of students—all of whom stand about three feet taller than you and look like college students. You approach them and call out

your senior's name. She steps out, says, "Hey, Fish!" and introduces herself. "Hmm. Okay. So far, so good," you think.

Ninth graders and their assigned seniors sit down to breakfast together, and your senior starts to talk about how much fun you are going to have. Other seniors start laughing. Your mind races; you can only guess about the evil plans they have hatched. An image surfaces in your mind's eye. In it, the doctor tells your parents, "I'm sorry, but we could not remove all the confetti and toilet paper from your child's face because they used hot tar as an adhesive." No, this just cannot be! As you focus again on the room, you see a fellow ninth grader being forced to stand on one of the tables. Oh, no. The torture is beginning. Oh, the humiliation. The seniors laugh as that poor ninth grader sings the school fight song. Why, Lord, why? When your classmate finishes the song, the seniors pat him on the back and continue eating. Uh, hold on. Where was the inhumane torture? the vicious cruelty? All he had to do was sing a song. That was not so bad!

All through breakfast, seniors make their ninth graders sing. One boy sings the latest hit from one of the pop divas. You look across the room at a friend. Obviously under the direction of his senior, your friend approaches a coach to ask permission to untie the coach's shoes and then tie them again. The coach laughs and allows the ninth grader to do the deed. All around you is silliness. Some ninth graders dance under the direction of seniors while others croon awful renditions of songs only your parents could like. The seniors are having a ball. You also



notice one more interesting thing—the ninth graders are also having a lot of fun.

Not to be left out, your senior invites you to stand on the table to belt out a song from the past. It's a classic hit to which everyone knows the words, so some of the other seniors get their charges to join in. All together, loud and proud, you sing, "I'm a little teapot, short and stout. / Here is my handle; here is my spout. . . ." Embarrassing? Maybe a little, but you just might be surprised to find the experience more fun than fear.

After breakfast, the principal addresses the students and announces Fish Week activities such as Bobbing for Bananas (do they float?), Dress Your Fish Day, Senior-Fish Karaoke Duos, and other goings-on that sound . . . well, kind of fun. The principal also goes over the guidelines for Fish Week and reminds the seniors of what the school considers appropriate behavior. He reassures the ninth graders that they are not required to participate in any event they are uncomfortable with, but he also encourages them to have fun.

## How to Handle the Situation

One of your greatest fears about high school is likely to be hazing. Many ninth graders enter high school fearing what upperclassmen will do to them. Put your mind at ease because in most high schools, hazing is a myth, not a reality. If hazing does occur, it is not treated lightly. Your safety and well-being is the first concern of your school's faculty and staff.

Despite these assurances, you might continue to have reservations because of headlines like “Students Stunned by Senior Stunt ” or perhaps “Frenzied Freshmen Found Fleeing Freemont High”? Beyond their bad alliteration, these headlines point to some inappropriate activity that goes on in high schools today. Television news in August inevitably contains stories about yet another hazing incident that resulted in the death or serious injury of a student. Though these events are tragic and should not be tolerated, it bears repeating that they are not the norm—especially in Catholic high schools. Bullying does not have a place on the list of Christlike behaviors Catholic schools work hard to instill in their students. Despite the media exposure these events attract, the majority of high school initiation activities do not result in fatalities or serious injury. Most attempts at injury are directed at your ego, and the weapons usually include making you wear silly hats or your grandmother’s clothing.

Ninth-grade initiation should be a fun time for all, but headlines and rumors often inflate the worries of many high school newcomers. To ease your worries, here are some helpful hints to hedge the horror of hazing.



### **Participate only in school-sanctioned activities.**

- If a senior tells you that he or she is going to take you an initiation event not organized by the school, say no. Do not go. Period.

## **Respect yourself.**

- Involve yourself only in activities that will make you and those who love you proud.
- Remember that your being new to a school does not give anybody permission to mistreat you.
- Sometimes a senior steps across the line. If this happens, tell a school administrator about it. Do this not only for yourself but also for other students who might be going through the same experience, as well as for future students who won't have to address the problem because you were brave enough to stand up against it.

## **Do your research.**

- Knowledge can reduce your anxiety.
- Ask friends or the siblings of friends about their ninth-grade experiences. Events such as ninth-grade initiation are usually school traditions that have not altered. Most likely you will go through initiation rituals similar to those of most ninth graders in recent years.
- Check out the school's policy on hazing.
- Ask a school administrator about past initiations. Did any serious hazing incidents occur? If so, how are they being prevented now?
- If possible, find out the plans for this year's school-sanctioned initiations.



### **Be clear with your senior.**

- In many schools, each new student is assigned a senior who is called and considered that student's senior (or senior sister or brother). Those with a really warped sense of humor call this person your senior buddy.
- If you are asked to do something with which you are uncomfortable, tell your senior in no uncertain terms that you will not do it. Don't go along in hopes that your senior is joking or you will find yourself covered in some awful-smelling substance that only comes off with that slimy blue stuff your dad uses to clean his hands after working on the car.



### **Have a sense of humor.**

- Your entry into high school should be fun. Maintain healthy boundaries, but feel free to jump in and be silly. Willingness to be the brunt of a good-natured joke can make the year a lot more fun for both your senior and you.
- If you show some willingness to do the silly things you are comfortable with, you and your senior will probably have a lot more fun. But if you do not feel comfortable with an activity, **DO NOT DO IT!**



### **Hazing is never appropriate.**

- The hazing of a new member of a team, club, or other group is not acceptable. Anything that degrades a

person or places a person in physical or emotional danger is not something to be tolerated. If you feel that hazing is occurring or is likely to happen, talk to a coach or a club sponsor. If you are not satisfied with the response, talk to the principal, a counselor, or your parents. Your safety should be your first concern.



### **Try not to worry!**

- Seniors are just three years away from being ninth graders themselves. They remember what it was like. Though they might not want to admit it, they usually have some sympathy for your situation.
- Most initiation activities are fun and enjoyable. If you are clear about your boundaries and participate only in school-sponsored events, very little will deserve your worry.

# I Will Not Have Any Friends or Fit In

A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter;  
he who finds one finds a treasure.

A faithful friend is beyond price,  
no sum can balance his worth.

(Sirach 6:14–15)

## Situation

It's time for lunch on your first day of school. You make your way across campus toward the cafeteria. As you cross the courtyard, you notice several groups of students sitting outside. You don't know any of them. As you enter the cafeteria, you scope out the scene. Looking to the right, you see no one from your old school. Looking to the left, you still cannot locate a single soul who looks even vaguely familiar.

You decide to head toward the lunch line, realizing that if you were to continue standing at the cafeteria door looking around for a friend, you would look like the loneliest geek on campus. Besides, the lunch line will provide needed time to scan the locale and map out a plan of action. It might even offer the opportunity to meet someone new.

As you slowly stagger forward, you notice another lonely line-dweller behind you. You start to think out loud, casually debating the menu offerings by saying,

“The pizza seems a tawdry attempt at southern Italian authenticity, while the Salisbury steak with macaroni and cheese appears to be an unpretentious and hearty offering, don’t you think?” Your companion in line gives you a confused look and takes several cautious steps away.

After this embarrassing attempt to impress your neighbor fails miserably, you look around the room and plan how you will maneuver your way around and avoid sitting next to the (insert appropriate group name here) while at the same time placing yourself at the coolest table where you will meet your best friend for life. As you check out at the cash register, the situation looks hopeless.

You walk quickly away from the lunch line and try to look as though you know where you are going. You stride swiftly and confidently, but it soon becomes apparent that you are circling aimlessly around the cafeteria. After the fourth revolution, the sophomores begin to place bets on the total number of times you will circumnavigate the school’s dining establishment.

You are finally driven outside to find a bench, convinced you will eat lunch alone for the entire four years of high school. “I’ll be okay,” you tell your miserable self. “I’ll just use my lunch period to read a book or get my homework done early.” You begin to delude yourself with demented notions about the virtues of a solitary life. You are a sad and pathetic excuse for a teenager.

It does not have to be this way.

## How to Handle the Situation

In addition to the stress of adjusting to new teachers, tougher classes, and new surroundings, ninth graders also have to deal with the daunting task of finding their way in a new social environment. Expectations are high, quite often too high, and the idea of making new friends can be intimidating.

When it comes to the high school social scene, some people think that when they enter high school, life will become like one of those reality television shows where the language is bleeped out so much that it is difficult to follow the plot line. In fact, some good young leaders arise who will usually help blaze the trail through high school. You can be one of them.

An astute ninth grader might also notice that high school seniors tend to be quite accepting of one another—or at least more accepting than are their younger schoolmates. As the members of a class approach the end of their high school careers, they seem to appreciate one another, especially their differences. Wouldn't it be great to get a head start on that?

Making friends will not be difficult, but it might require a little effort on your part. While you are finding and fostering friendships, don't forget to flash back to the following fine formulas.



### **Get involved in extracurricular activities.**

- Join a sport, a club, the student council, a foreign language organization, or one of the many other



groups on campus. Membership in a group is a great way to meet people with the same interests.

- Try something that you might not at first consider, such as cross-country skiing or the movie critics group. Joining such groups is a great way to branch out and meet people outside your regular gang.



### **Try to meet a lot of different kinds of people.**

- High school is a great time to broaden your horizons. Catholic high schools usually have more students than the Catholic junior highs that many students previously attended. The experience is also new for those who went to public grade schools. The point is that high school is full of people with varying backgrounds and experiences who are interesting and fun to be around. You might be surprised by whom you enjoy being around.



### **Do not worry about what other people think.**

- Telling someone not to worry about what other people think is sometimes like telling someone in the path of a tornado not to worry about the wind. You can talk until you are blue in the face, but people are still going to worry. Nonetheless, you can do things to lessen the impact of your peers' influence on your life.
- Some people do not always get along with others. It is unreasonable to expect that all your friends will like

one another. Hang around the people you want to hang around with.

- Be self-assured enough not to be swayed by public opinion.
- Do not check the polls. What if Juliet had not considered Romeo because he was not popular among her friends? They would never have gotten together and . . . uh . . . well . . . okay . . . she would not have died. But while true, that's not the point.



### **You have nothing to prove among true friends.**

- Don't you hate it when your parents say, "If he really were your friend, you wouldn't have to prove anything to him"? Well, the worst part is that it is true. If being someone's friend includes being pressured into doing something you don't think is right, just don't do it. True friendship will not put you in that situation. You will also come to regret your participation. (Don't you hate it when your mom and dad are right?)
- You might think that rejection by a particular group of people will sound the death toll for your social life. Not true. If you make the effort, you will always be able to find friends who accept you for who you are.



### **Your old friends will make new friends too.**

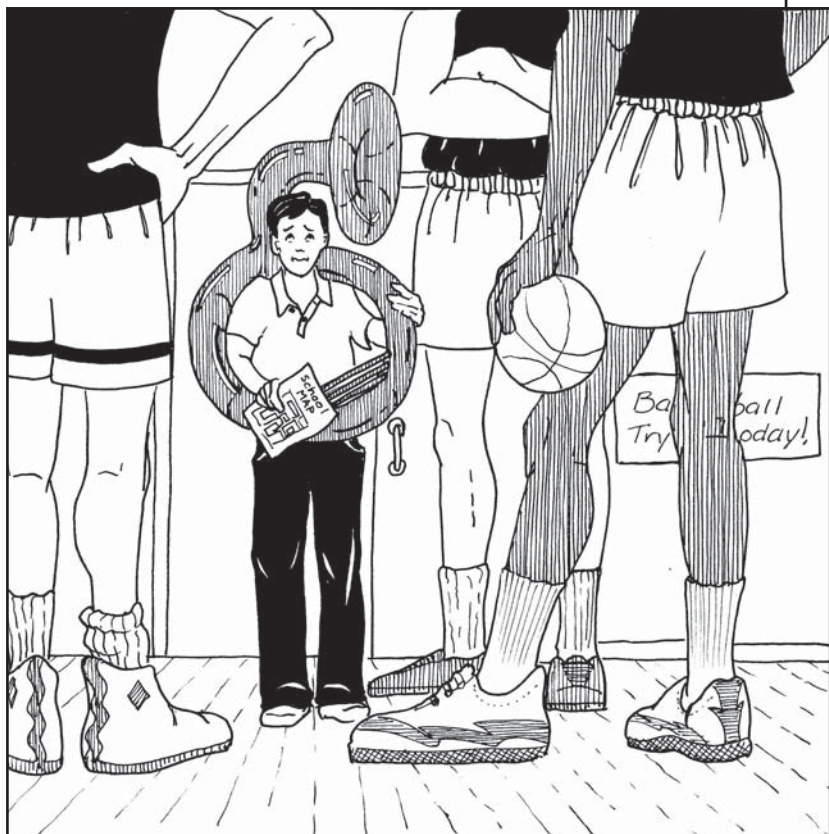
- Making new friends is exciting, but remember that your old friends will be doing the same. Keep a check on your jealousy.

- Just because your old friends hang out with someone you do not really like is no reason to end your friendship. You do not have to become buddy-buddy with the new person in order to remain friends with your old friends.



### **Choose your friends wisely.**

- Peer pressure is a lowdown, dirty thing. Teenagers tend to deny its power, but secretly they all know the lure of social acceptance and the deep fear of being excluded. Putting yourself in the company of people who do not live by the same moral code that you do can put you dead-center in a situation you will most likely regret. Avoid it.
- Surround yourself with people who are positive, honest, and supportive of you. You do not need put-downs, insults, and a negative worldview in the midst of so many changes in your life.
- Many lifelong friendships begin in high school. For some reason, this seems to be more true for friends who met in Catholic schools. Something about the environment encourages these relationships. Maybe the reason is the sense of family that Catholic schools work hard to encourage among students and faculty. Whatever the reason, make sure you take advantage of it. Find good friends and keep them.



Everyone gets lost once in a while.

# I Will Get Lost

The Israelites said to Moses, “We are perishing; we are lost, all of us are lost!” (Numbers 17:12)

## Situation

You look at the clock. The minute hand is about to fall as the teacher wraps up a lecture on expectations for the fall-semester biology class. You subtly fill your backpack a minute or so early. A drop of sweat slowly trickles down your forehead just . . . as . . . the . . . period . . . bell . . . RINGS!

And you're off. From the strategically located seat chosen for its proximity to the exit, you run toward the door. You are the first out of the classroom. Yes! Off you go, down the hallways of Saint Eusebius High School Raceway. You speed around the corner, just missing the new French teacher, who is balancing a full cup of hot coffee on her briefcase. You duck under the backpack of a varsity lineman to avoid catching a senior's eye. In just under two minutes, you've arrived halfway across campus to your locker. You have one minute to pack up your books and make it to algebra on the other side of the school. There, it is rumored, the teacher has an intense distaste for tardiness. You look at your watch. Yes! Time is on your side and the hallways are thinning out, allowing you more room to maneuver between your peers. You

look at the school map your mother made, then you fold it up and stick in your back pocket (okay, maybe she was right). You hop over a fellow ninth grader bending over to tie his shoe. You dodge the oncoming traffic by jumping up and turning yourself sideways between two pedestrians while still maintaining forward motion. The hallways become less and less populated, signaling the approaching sound of the tardy bell. Your destination has got to be just around the next corner. You turn, reach for the door, and step into the classroom at the sound of the bell. Ah, you did it! You are flooded with relief and the sense of a job well done. When you look up, you find a class full of juniors and a sweet, elderly history teacher asking if you are lost. Lost!? No, it can't be . . . the strategic seat location . . . the map . . . the plans . . . the swift footwork in the hallways . . .

## How to Handle the Situation

Navigating unfamiliar surroundings is a challenge for anyone at any age. If you look around, you will notice that other people are also trying to figure out where they are and where they should be. New teachers and staff members as well as transfer students in their sophomore, junior, or senior years have the same problems.

These difficulties can be diminished, if not eliminated—through preparation. High schools often have a practice run-through for new students during orientation. Teachers open their classrooms and the bells ring as on a regular school day, except that the periods are

only long enough for teachers to introduce themselves and answer questions about the location of the students' next classroom. Other teachers and older students stand in hallways to direct the wayward travelers in their search for their next academic abode.

If your school does not have a practice like this, you can do some things on your own. Grab a few friends who will go to the same high school and try the following suggestions.



### **Walk through your schedule before the first day of school.**

- Most schools are open during the summer. Ask the admissions counselor or someone in the main office for permission to acquaint yourself with the campus. You and your friends might even be offered a tour.
- Try to find out where your locker is—or at least its general location. Usually lockers are assigned according to grade level. Ninth-grade lockers will most likely all be in a single location.
- If you get your schedule before the first day of school, visit the school and walk from classroom to classroom, following your schedule as you would during a regular school day. Note any long treks that you will need to make. Can you make them easily in the allotted time?
- Schedule trips to your locker. If you have to go across campus to get to your next class, it is probably not a good time to stop at your locker. Pack up two classes worth of books and avoid the extra stop.



### **Keep a map handy.**

- Usually the school provides incoming students with a map of the campus. If not, ask for one at the main office. If there is no map, draw one.
- If you are worried about looking foolish, ask yourself whether looking at a map is more foolish than walking in late to class. If you are still worried, reduce your map on a copier so it is not so obvious, or just put it inside a binder. No one will notice.



### **Know how the buildings are arranged.**

- Most classrooms are numbered in an organized manner. For example, each room number might have four digits. The first digit usually indicates the number of the building. The second digit specifies the floor level. The remaining two digits identify the room. Room 2217, then, is located in the second building (first digit), on the second floor (second digit). Take a minute and figure out how the rooms in your school are numbered.
- High schools are also often arranged by academic departments. For example, all the science classes are usually located in the same building or hall, while the English classes are held in another. This isn't always true because some instructors teach in both departments, yet have only one classroom. By remembering the locations of these main departments, you at least narrow down the possibilities.



## **Ask for help.**

- Teachers should always be willing to help you, that is, if they aren't also new to the school. Older students might be good sources of information. If you are too embarrassed to ask them, check with a fellow ninth grader. You will often share the same teachers and they may have the same teacher and classroom, just at a different time.
- The maintenance workers are your friends. No one knows the campus better than they do. They are usually more than happy to assist you.
- Drop into the counselors' office, the library, or the main office if they are nearby. Someone there is bound to be able to help you.

## **Do not worry!**

- Your teachers will probably be forgiving if you are late the first few days. They know that you are still learning your new environment. They usually have a short grace period regarding tardiness. But make sure you do not try to take advantage of their kindness!
- Not knowing where you are is a temporary condition that is easily solved. By the end of the first week, you should have your schedule down. By the second or third week, you will probably know the campus very well.

# I Will Make a Fool of Myself

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. (1 Corinthians 3:18–19)

## Situation

This is it—the night of the first dance of your ninth-grade year. You shower, brush your teeth, and spray a little breath freshener. You pick out your nicest clothes, put them on, and check yourself in the mirror so many times that your little brother starts to make fun of you. Nonetheless, you continue because you do not want one thing out of place. This is your night.

You feel like you have prepared well for the evening. Last week you rented the DVD showing you how to dance the latest urban-pop-mambo-hip-hop-salsa-groove-cardio-funk-swing, but of course you didn't tell anyone about that. You want people to think that you were born knowing how to dance that way. You're a natural, of course!

Your mom drops you off a block away from school so you can walk the rest of the way and make your grand and fashionably late entrance. You walk into the gymnasium, ready for the love and adoration of your peers. The music is loud. You nod to a friend in the distance as you stroll

over to check out the hors d'oeuvres. You decide against the Cheetos, fearing they might clash with your breath freshener, not to mention that cheesy-lip look that can be such a turn-off.

You determine that the dance floor is ready for you. You look over and see that special someone you have had your eye on. You have also noticed this person looking at you in the hallway on your way to biology class. Your souls connect and the next thing you know, you are on the floor shaking your body in time. Your hair moves with the rhythm but falls back into place, just like in the commercials on television. The lights flash as the deejay spins the hits.

Then out of nowhere you hear laughter. You turn around to see what is going on. Maybe it is the drama teacher, Mr. Green. You had heard that he thought of himself as quite the talented break-dancer who was not shy when it came to displaying his imagined talents. Or maybe it is the old music teacher dancing with Father Schwenzer, the principal who won a few jitterbug contests in his younger years.

You turn around but do not see anything funny. You notice a crowd looking at you. But why? They are all laughing. As you try to figure it out, your partner starts to laugh too. "What's going on?" you think. "Is it my clothes? my hair? Did my clothes rip?" Your mind races. "Is it my dancing? Did someone stick a sign on my back?" Dreadful thoughts spin out of control. "Is there something hanging out of my nose? Why are they laughing at me?"

## How to Handle the Situation

Looking like a fool happens to everyone. Presidents, teachers, movie stars, your friends, your parents . . . everyone looked like a fool of at some time and in one way or another. What separates the eternal fool from the temporary fool is how each handles the situation. It is a pleasure to present these particular propositions on how to prudently preside over the public faux pas.



### **Laugh at your own blunders.**

- A surefire way to quiet a classroom full of students laughing at your slipup is to laugh at yourself. The message is loud and clear: “I messed up. I am not perfect, but it is not the end of the world and it is not really a big deal.” You will be amazed at how the rest of the class will follow that lead.
- When the word about your gaffe gets around school, someone will inevitably approach you in the lunchroom and try to get a rise out of you by saying something like, “Hey, I heard about (fill in your particular blunder). You are such a dork!” To take the wind right out of this naysayer’s sail, try this response: “Yeah, that was a dumb thing to do! I don’t know what got into me.” Then quickly change the subject.



## **Do not let it get you down.**

- If you get through life without a few first-class goofs, you will be the first human to achieve this. It is amazing how many people have gone on to live successful and happy lives after making fools of themselves. They even somehow learn to look back and see the humor in it too.
- Put the situation into perspective. Of all of the things happening in the world (poverty, war, sickness), is this event really worthy of your anxiety and despair?
- If the event still bothers you, talk to someone you trust right away. Your parents, friends, and teachers have all been in the same position and can offer advice or at least an open ear. If that doesn't help, see the school counselor. It is better to address the issue right away so that it does not linger and keep bothering you.



## **Learn from your mistakes.**

- Without mistakes, humans would not have learned as much as they have. Something truly positive can come out of a miserable experience, even though it feels like nothing good could ever result from the misery that engulfs you.



## **Try not to pay much attention to public opinion.**

- Public opinion ebbs and flows. The only thing you can count on is that it will change. Only one opinion is important, and that opinion is way past the confines of high school popularity contests. God is the one who should guide your ways and remind you of the important things in life. In the passage at the beginning of this chapter, Saint Paul points out that looking like a fool is not so bad, if it is for the right reasons. God also puts people in their place when they start to think that they are so cool. It is a good thing to remember what real foolishness looks like.