

Managing exam anxiety.

Supporting your child through the exam year.



Recognise the signs of exam stress...

Children and young people who are stressed may:

- worry a lot
- feel tense
- have headaches and stomach pains
- not sleep well
- be irritable
- lose interest in food or eat more than normal
- not enjoy activities they previously enjoyed
- be negative and have a low mood
- feel hopeless about the future



Encourage your child to ...

TALK!



Make sure your child eats well

- A balanced diet is vital for your child's health, and can help them feel well during exam periods.
- Some parents find high-fat, high-sugar and high-caffeine foods and drinks, such as energy drinks, cola, sweets, chocolate, burgers and chips, make their children hyperactive, irritable and moody.
- Where possible, involve your child in shopping for food and encourage them to choose some healthy snacks.

Help your child get enough sleep

- Good sleep improves thinking and concentration. Most teenagers need 8 to 10 hours' sleep a night.
- Allow half an hour or so for your child to wind down between studying, watching TV or using a computer and going to bed, to help them get a good night's sleep.
- Cramming all night before an exam is usually a bad idea. Sleep will benefit your child far more than a few hours of panicky last-minute study.

Be flexible during exams

Be flexible around exam time. When your child is revising all day, do not worry about household jobs left undone or untidy bedrooms.

Staying calm yourself can help. Remember, exams do not last forever.

Talk about exam nerves

- Remind your child that it's normal to feel anxious. Nervousness is a natural reaction to exams. The key is to put these nerves to positive use.
- If anxiety is getting in the way rather than helping, encourage your child to practise the activities they'll be doing on the day of the exam. This will help it feel less scary.
- For example, this may involve doing practice papers under exam conditions or seeing the exam hall beforehand. School staff should be able to help with this.
- Help your child face their fears and see these activities through, rather than avoiding them.
- Encourage them to think about what they know and the time they've already put into studying to help them feel more confident

Help them study

- Make sure your child has somewhere comfortable to study. Ask them how you can support them with their revision.
- Help them come up with practical ideas that will help them revise, such as drawing up a revision schedule or getting hold of past papers for practice.
- To motivate your child, encourage them to think about their goals in life and see how their revision and exams are related to them.

Do not add to the pressure

Support group Childline says many children who contact them feel that most pressure at exam time comes from their family.

Listen to your child, give them support and avoid criticism.

Before they go in for a test or exam, be reassuring and positive. Let them know that failing is not the end of the world. If things do not go well they may be able to take the exam again.

After each exam, encourage your child to talk it through with you. Discuss the parts that went well rather than focusing on the questions they found difficult. Then move on and focus on the next test, rather than dwelling on things that cannot be changed.

Encourage exercise during exams

Exercise can help boost energy levels, clear the mind and relieve stress. It does not matter what it is – walking, cycling, swimming, football and dancing are all effective.

Activities that involve other people can be particularly helpful.

Make time for treats

- With your child, think about rewards for doing revision and getting through each exam.
- Rewards do not need to be big or expensive. They can include simple things like making their favourite meal or watching TV.
- When the exams are over, help your child celebrate by organising an end-of-exams treat.

Supporting your child during the exam period:

- Make sure they have a comfortable place to work and study which is quiet.
- If you do not have a suitable spot, make it easy for them to study elsewhere, like the library or at someone's home. It may be better to go out and let them have the house to themselves at crucial times for an hour or so.
- Accept that some people can revise better with music or the TV on in the background.
- Establish a revision routine by re-arranging the family's schedules and priorities that works for them.
- Talk to the school or attend the parent information evenings so you can get the best tips on supporting them.
- Be lenient about chores and untidiness as much as you are able to.
- Give them a break and understand lost tempers and moodiness.
- Try to avoid nagging them as it can help them lose focus.
- It is never too late to study, revise or ask for help.
- Schedule small and frequent rewards for the effort they are putting in.
- Arrange some downtime so they can have a break from revision and exams.
- Be calm, positive and reassuring and put the whole thing into perspective.
- Research good study sites such as BBC Bitesize for tips and ideas.

Remind your child to keep things in perspective. Exams aren't everything!

- Lots of people will tell you this, because it's true - exams aren't everything. Whatever happens in your exams, you can still be successful in life afterwards. So if you don't do as well as you'd hoped, try to keep things in perspective.
- Employers don't just look at your exam scores. They're just as interested in your attitude, your transferable skills and how well you'll get on with other people.
- Exam success doesn't define you as a person. Everyone copes differently in different situations and there's so much more to your personality than how well you can respond to an exam.
- Think about how far you've come already. You've already done incredibly well to get to university, and stopping or failing exams at this point isn't 'throwing away' your past success.
- Once you've done an exam, try to forget about it. There's nothing you can do about it, and worrying won't change your mark.

Resources:

- [Exam Stress | How To Deal with Exam Stress | YoungMinds](#)
- [Help your child beat exam stress - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- [Resources to help with test anxiety - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [14 ways to beat exam stress | Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems](#)
- [Exam Stress | Coping Strategies | DEAL | Samaritans](#)
- If you are concerned about their mental health, make an appointment to see your GP. They can often refer you to local services that can help.