



Advice for parents / carers to help students with stress during exams and revision

There are many signs to indicate that a student is suffering from stress and mental health issues during and leading up to the much pressurised exam period.

Young people who experience stress may:

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

Having someone to talk to about their work can help. Support from a parent, teacher or close friend can help young people share their worries and keep things in perspective.

Encourage your child to talk to an adult they trust or a member of school staff who they feel is supportive. If you feel your child isn't coping, it may also be helpful for you to talk to their teachers at school.

Make sure your child eats well

A balanced diet is vital for your child's health, and can help them to feel well during exam periods.

Food and drinks that are high in fat, sugar and caffeine (such as cola, sweets, chocolate, burgers and chips) can cause young people to be hyperactive, irritable and moody and do not help with revision and exam concentration.

Where possible involve your child in shopping for food and cooking it and encourage them to choose some healthy snacks. This will also give them a change of scenery and a break from the revision pressure.

This website has some top tips for healthy teenage diets -

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/healthy-eating-teens.aspx>



Help your child get enough sleep

Good sleep will improve thinking and concentration. Most teenagers need between 8 and 10 hours' sleep a night.

Allow half an hour or so 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.

Evidence shows that night time sleep is just as important as healthy eating and exercise. Those who don't get enough sleep are more likely to be overweight or obese as they tend to crave and eat sugary or starchy food during the day to give them energy to stay awake. This then has a knock on effect on their ability to concentrate and study.

The key to how much is enough sleep is whether a child gets up fairly easily in the morning, is alert and happy for most of the day, and is not grumpy.

Be flexible during exams

Be flexible around exam time. When your child is revising all day, don't worry about household jobs that are left undone or untidy bedrooms.

Staying calm yourself can help. Remember, exams don't last forever.

The following website has some top tips on supporting teenagers through exam stress - <http://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/school-learning/exam-stress/>

Help them to study

Make sure your child has somewhere comfortable to study. Ask them how you can best support them with their revision. Allow them to litter the home with "post it" notes if they need to. Evidence shows that a change of scenery for revision helps to lock in knowledge so allow them to use different rooms in the house to study in if they need to.

Help them to 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 help with motivation, encourage your child to think about their goals in life and see how their revision and exams are related to them but don't pressurise them. i.e. avoid discussing that failure will lead to them not fulfilling their dreams etc.

Talk about exam nerves

Remind your child that feeling anxious is normal. Nervousness is a natural reaction to exams. The key is to put these nerves to positive use.

If anxiety seems to be getting in the way rather than helping, encourage your child to practise the sort of activities they will be doing on the day of the exam. This will help it feel less scary on the day.



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 to face their fears and see these activities through rather than escape or avoid them.

Encourage them to think through what they do know and the time they have already put into studying to help them feel more confident.

Encourage exercise during exams

Exercise can help boost energy levels, clear the mind and relieve stress. It doesn't matter what it is - walking, cycling, swimming, football and dancing are all effective.

Activities that involve other people can be particularly helpful. If your child has previously been a part of a sports club, encourage them to continue with these activities during the revision period – some routines need to remain.

The following website offers advice on exercise for young people - <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-young-people.aspx>

The following website offers ideas for enjoyable exercise for all ages - <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Fitness/Pages/Fitnesshome.aspx>

Don't add to the pressure

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

Try to listen to your child, give support and avoid criticism.

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

After each exam, encourage your child to talk it through with you. Talk about the parts that went well rather than focusing on the questions they had difficulties with. Then move on and focus on the next test, rather than dwelling on things that can't be changed.

Here is a website that offers advice for exam stress and pressure - <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-stress/>



Make time for treats

Think through with your child some rewards for doing revision and getting through each exam.

Rewards don't 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.

When should you get help?

Some young people feel much better once exams are over, but that's not the case for all young people.

If your child's anxiety or low mood is severe, persists and interferes with their everyday life, it's a good idea to get some help. A visit to your GP is a good place to start.

This website offers other advice and places to seek help –

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/anxiety-in-children.aspx>