

Coping With Exam Stress – A Guide for Parents

At this time of year we know that many students will be feeling worried about their mock exams and their exams next year. We also know that parents too, can be very stressed about how their child will perform, as it is natural to want your child to get the best possible marks in their exams.

A small amount of nervousness is healthy for a student facing exams. It is when the stress becomes overwhelming and difficult to cope with that it becomes a problem and will affect their performance.

We have put together a brief guide on how you can reduce this anxiety. By reducing it for yourself, you will help to minimise it for your child too. Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Try not to nag or argue about revision. Instead offer to help with short-term daily goals. Some students will welcome your help, while others will not want your involvement.
- ✓ Encourage your child to devise their own revision timetable. If you do it for your child, it may lead to feelings of powerlessness or that they can't manage on their own. Let them see that you trust them and tell them they will manage.
- ✓ Giving advice can sometimes be perceived as criticism. Ask open, less confrontational questions like, 'What did you cover today?' or 'Which methods work best for you?'
- ✓ Siblings will prepare for exams in different ways so try not to draw comparisons between your children.
- ✓ Don't brush off your child's anxiety. Saying 'Just do your best' can be perceived as dismissive by children.
- ✓ Some teenagers won't admit to feeling stressed so instead of asking 'What's wrong?' if your child is moody, try to be more open and ask 'Are you feeling stressed?'
- ✓ Resist the temptation to poke your head around their bedroom door when they are supposed to be revising and perhaps cut them some slack over keeping their room tidy or helping with chores. Tidying can become a displacement activity - something a teenager does to avoid revising.
- ✓ If your child does ask for help, then suggest the following - A structured but not rigid revision plan. - Studying in blocks of 20-30 minutes. - Limiting revision to four hours a day and, if they achieve this, praise them. If not, move on.
- ✓ Make the revision area a social media free zone and away from the TV.
- ✓ Regular snacks but avoiding sugary foods, including junk foods and fizzy drinks. Try to encourage them to drink lots of water as this aids concentration.
- ✓ An activity such as sport or a walk to clear their head and have a different focus.
- ✓ A good breakfast before exams. Some exams are more than two hours long so slow release energy foods such as porridge, eggs, banana on toast and/or a fruit smoothie will help sustain concentration levels.
- ✓ An early night before exams.
- ✓ Finally, trust your child when they say they want to do well, they usually mean it.