

Supporting your child with exams



Being a parent/carer

No one said it is easy being a parent/carer! Here are some pointers for supporting your child with exams. None of these are rocket science. Try to remember what it was like sitting exams. Supporting and encouraging your child to look after themselves is key as exams are more of a marathon rather than a sprint.

Being prepared

Make learning part of the culture at home – pin up their revision and exam timetable on the noticeboard in the kitchen and work around it. Make sure they know what they are supposed to have learnt and that they have all their notes, books and essays to hand.

Making a plan

Encourage them to be organised, prioritise learning and follow a realistic revision programme. Don't leave things until the last minute. Working out how much time you have to revise and planning how you can use it best by making a timetable is a key factor in how to deal with exam stress. Another technique recommended by all time management experts is taking what feels like an overwhelming task and breaking it down into manageable chunks.

Know when and where you work best

Allow them to work when they are most alert. We all have slightly different body clocks – are you a night owl or a dawn lark? Everyone has different revision styles. Wherever they feel calm and in control is the best place for dealing with exam stress.

Taking breaks

Encourage taking a break, time to relax and talking to someone if you notice they are starting to feel overwhelmed. Psychologists suggest that we can only concentrate properly for about 45 minutes at one stretch, while neuroscientists tell us that the longer we try and focus on one thing, the less our brains are able to deal with it effectively. Take breaks to stay refreshed. Instead of cramming in more revision or, indeed, stressing over how to deal with exam stress, the best thing might simply be to do something completely different.

Exercise

Promote getting out of the house for some exercise, a walk or to meet a friend. It will help to clear their mind so they don't feel trapped in a cycle of revision. Exercise is probably one of the best ways of dealing with exam stress. Anything from walking the dog to going for a swim, run or bike ride helps reduce physical tension that can lead to aches and pains, and releases natural feel-good brain chemicals. Making plans with friends makes it much harder to give excuses.

Eating well

Keep them well nourished with a healthy, balanced diet. Healthy diet = healthy body = healthy mind.

Keeping your blood sugar levels steady so that you don't have energy dips during the day and can sleep well at night is a vital way of dealing with exam stress. Avoid lots of processed, sugary foods like cereal, biscuits, sweets and chocolate. Lean protein like chicken, salmon or egg, plenty of veg and carbs that release their energy slowly like wholegrain bread, rice and pasta will keep energy levels steady. Pulses like chickpeas and lentils are great for vegetarians (and others), since they contain both protein and slow-release carbs.

Sleeping well

Encourage them to follow and maintain a healthy sleep pattern. At least 7 hours with regular sleep times/pattern, no blue screens or exercise 45 minutes before bed. A hot bath and having somewhere dedicated just for sleeping (and not for watching TV or going on a computer, phone or tablet) will help you switch off. Being unable to sleep the night before an exam is understandable, and our bodies are able to cope with lack of sleep for a day or so. Worrying about not being able to nod off only makes matters worse.

Drinking well

Keep them well hydrated and watch the sugary drinks and caffeine intake. Staying hydrated with lots of water. Juices or sugary drinks can make you feel jittery and disturb your energy levels. Caffeinated tea and coffee perk you up, but drink too much caffeine, and you feel jittery or have problems sleeping. No caffeine after late afternoon.

Top study/revision tips

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVlvxHJdqI8>

The 9 best scientific study tips

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p60rN9JEapg>

Exam technique

https://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_3814525999&feature=iv&src_vid=fHfHSq7PVDU&v=ob9TMDnB31I

Talking about it

Always be calm and positive – don't get drawn into arguments or negativity. Almost everyone finds exams stressful. Giving them the time and opportunity to express their worries to someone they trust will help them get it out of their system.

Relaxing

If you are really anxious, find a calm, quiet space and try breathing deeply in and out for a few minutes, focusing your mind on something pleasant like a beautiful place with happy memories – anything that helps you wind down.

Rewards

Support and encourage a work/life balance – having something to look forward to is a great motivator. Build in treats to their timetable. Plan something exciting to celebrate the end of the exams.

Keeping exams in perspective

Recognise their efforts and reassure them. If they feel they have really messed up an exam, there's nothing you can do until results day. Worrying about it won't help – and may reduce their chances of doing well in other exams they are taking. Stay positive and avoid post exam post mortems. Help them focus on the next exam and preparing for it with a clear mind.