

Managing Exam Stress

Parents can find exams just as stressful as their child!

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Changes to GCSE exams

Typical student studying English Language and Literature, Maths, Double Science, Language, RE, Product Design, History, Drama.



	2016	2019
Total number of exams	13	22
Total length of exams	18	33
Exams represent % of GCSE assessment	49%	87%



2019

- Exam questions designed to be more challenging and difficult
- 1-9 grades make achieving top grades more difficult
- All exams taken at the end of Year 11

ASCL 2017



Fields of Learning

Clarity | Simplicity | Impact

Working together as a team

Students are responsible for maintaining good attendance and actively engaging in lessons and their learning. Also seeking help and guidance when needed.



School will deliver the curriculum and stretch and challenge students in their learning so they are well prepared for exams as well offering guidance and support.

Parents are there to support and reassure their child but also challenge them when they are overconfident and give them a gentle nudge in the right direction when needed.



Mental Health and Wellbeing

Support networks:

- PSHE curriculum.
- Staff support – Form Tutor, Year Manager, Staff Healthy Minds Champions, SEND, Wellbeing & Engagement Worker.
- Dealing with exams (managing exam stress) – information and learning.
- Signposting information (web site – supporting learning).
- Useful links – local services and support groups – Sheffield MH guide.

Ever had that feeling? (exam stress)

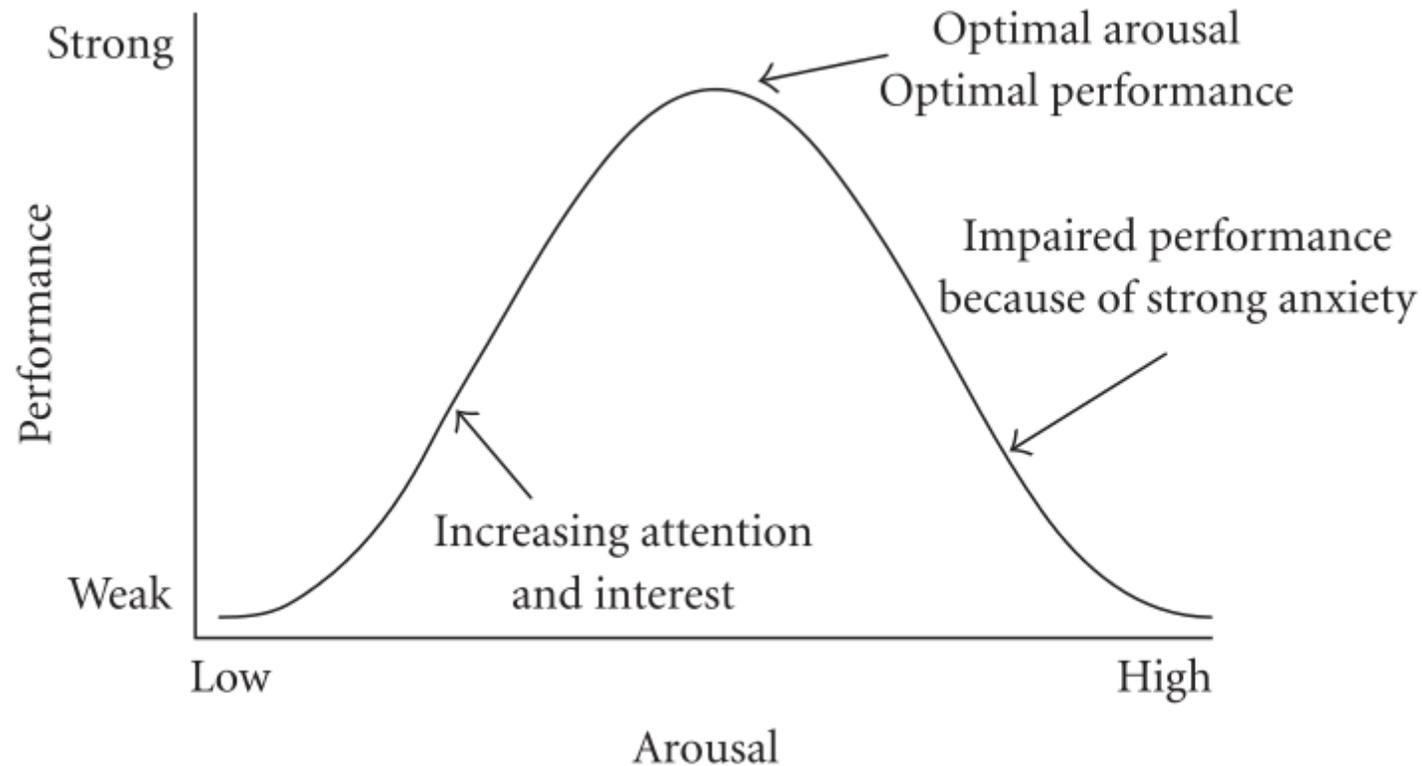
Physical sensations:

- nausea (feeling sick)
- tense muscles and headaches
- pins and needles
- feeling light headed or dizzy
- faster breathing
- sweating or hot flushes
- a fast, thumping or irregular heart beat
- raised blood pressure
- difficulty sleeping
- needing the toilet more frequently, or less frequently
- churning in the pit of your stomach
- experiencing panic attacks

Psychological sensations:

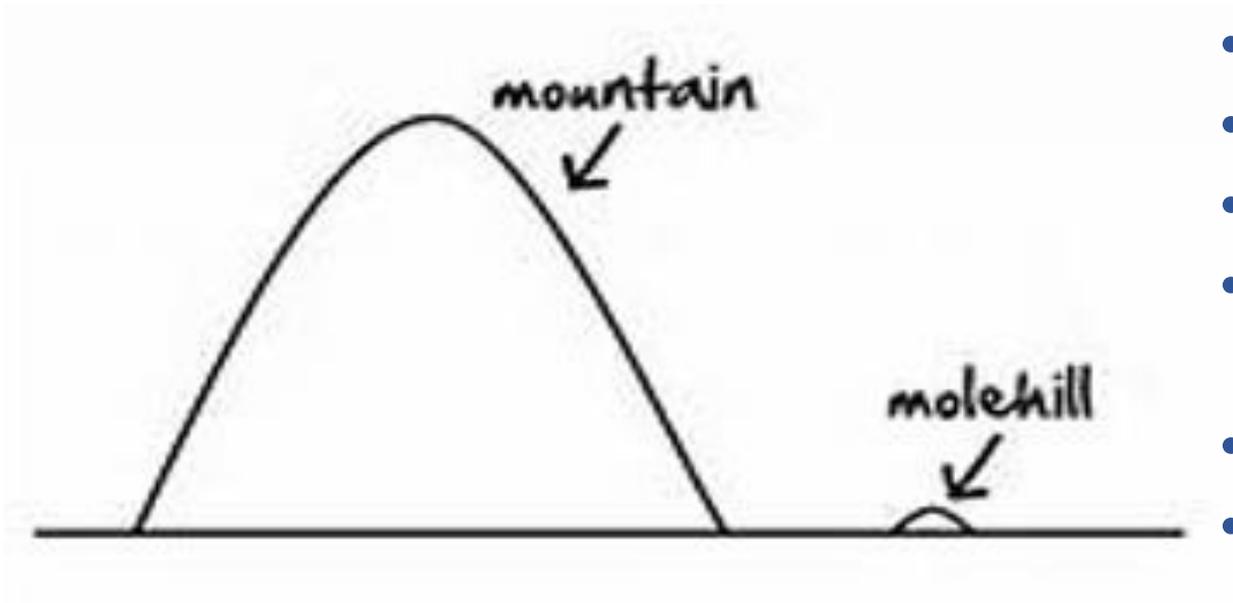
- feeling tense, nervous and on edge
- having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst
- feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down
- feeling like other people can see you're anxious and are looking at you
- feeling your mind is really busy with thoughts
- dwelling on negative experiences, or thinking over a situation again and again (this is called rumination)
- feeling restless and not being able to concentrate
- feeling numb

Is anxiety and worry helpful?



As with everything in life... A little bit of stress is good for you!

When we're overwhelmed with stress or worry, our thought processes can:-



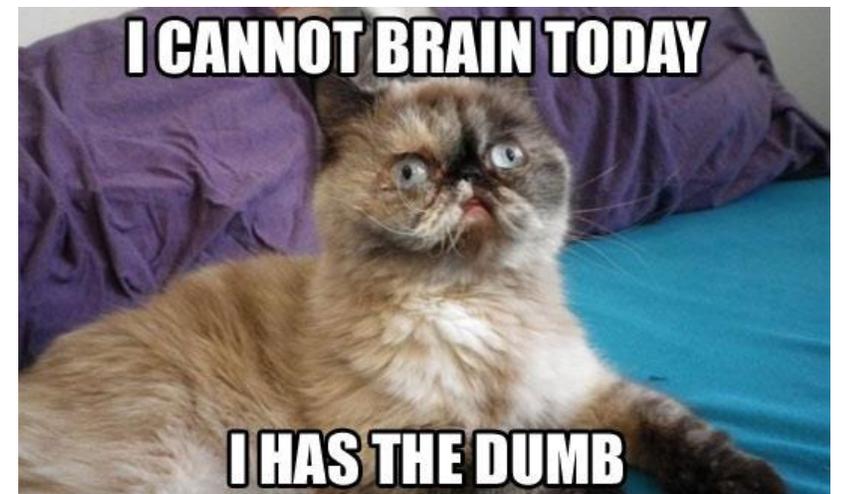
- Be defensive
- Can only think about oneself
- Can only think about the here and now
- Be critical and judgemental
- Remember disasters and predict catastrophe
- Make us lose focus
- Make our brains feel like a jumble

Why does your brain offer such suggestions at such an unhelpful time?

Because the older part of our brain is trying to keep you safe. It relies on:

- **Overestimation of danger** – it's going to be a catastrophe!
- Fast **generalisation** - worst scenarios!
- **Reading others minds** – everyone thinks...

What we actually need is the **logical rational** part of our brains to function so we can **think rationally** and decide what to do.



Parents role
Be there
to offer
reassurance
and tackle self
deception



Adolescent Brain: What's happening?

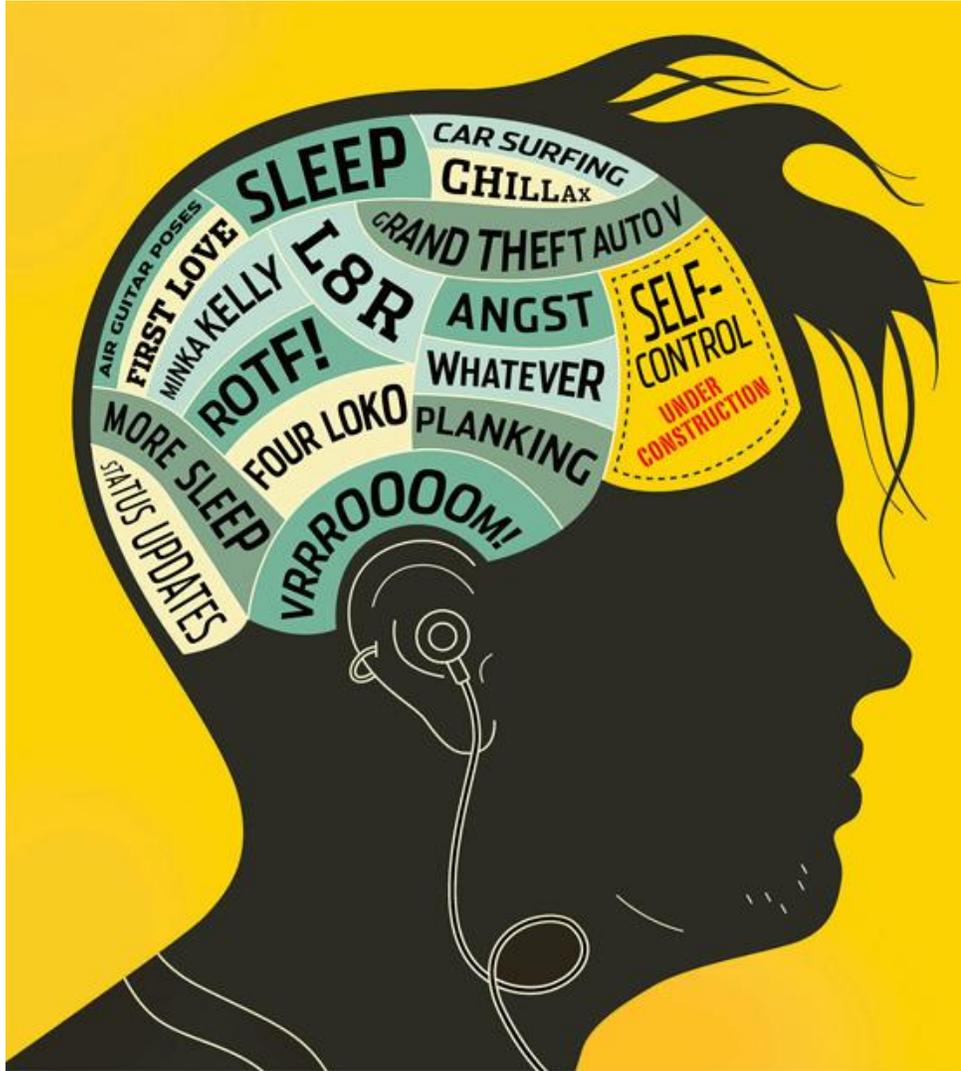
Remodelling: Puberty encourages the brain to undergo a large structural change.





CREDIT: [HTTP://COGX.INFO](http://COGX.INFO) (DR. BROWN)

- ORGANIZE, PRIORITIZE, ACTIVATE WORK
- MONITOR AND SELF-REGULATE ACTIONS
- UTILIZE WORKING MEMORY & SHORT TERM RECALL
- MANAGE FRUSTRATIONS AND MODULATE EMOTIONS
- REGULATE ALERTNESS, SUSTAIN EFFORT AND SPEED
- FOCUS, SUSTAIN AND ABILITY TO SHIFT TASK ATTENTION



Brain developments during adolescence (12 – 20 yrs.)

- Emotional Spark
- Social engagement
- Novelty Seeking
- Creative exploration

The take home message:

‘It is vital to keep the lines of connection and communication open ‘

Young people need a reliable relationship in their lives

Daniel J Siegel (2014) Brain Storm

Emotional Spark

- Opportunity: Filled with passion and desire.
- Risk: Get upset quicker, feeling irritable, find it difficult to trust their own emotional state

- **Impulsivity** –difficulty in regulating their emotion.
- Difficulty in understanding the **emotional intent** of others
- **Lack of awareness** of own emotion, where it's coming from

Social Engagement

- Opportunity: Learn social skills that can last a life time, develop friendships that can teach you how to be connected to other people,
- Risk: Feeling pressured by peers to match what they have/ their items.

- **Urgency to fit into a group**, association with other peers similar to themselves and creating safety in numbers .
- **Decrease in communication** with parents/ teachers and a greater desire to build external relationships
- Succumbing **to peer pressure**, greater importance of what peers think of them.

Novelty Seeking

- Opportunity: Get you ready to try on the uncertainty, unfamiliar and uncomfortable and unsafe to prepare you to live independently
- Risk: Risk and danger, being injured.

- Sense of **boredom**, lack of engagement in activities perceived as being mundane.
- A desire to explore and **experience new things**
- Lack of emphasis on the consequences of their actions, despite knowing the **dangers**.

Creative Exploration

- Opportunity: Excitement of changing the world, adolescents display ingenuity, courage and creativity.
- Risk: Feeling disorientated due to changes in perspectives.

- May openly **challenge** those in authority (Parents/Teachers) when they feel they are doing something they do not agree with.
- **Pushing boundaries** to see how far they can go, what the set limitations are in that individual/ particular environment.
- **Shift in the perspective of others** (e.g. parents aren't who they thought).

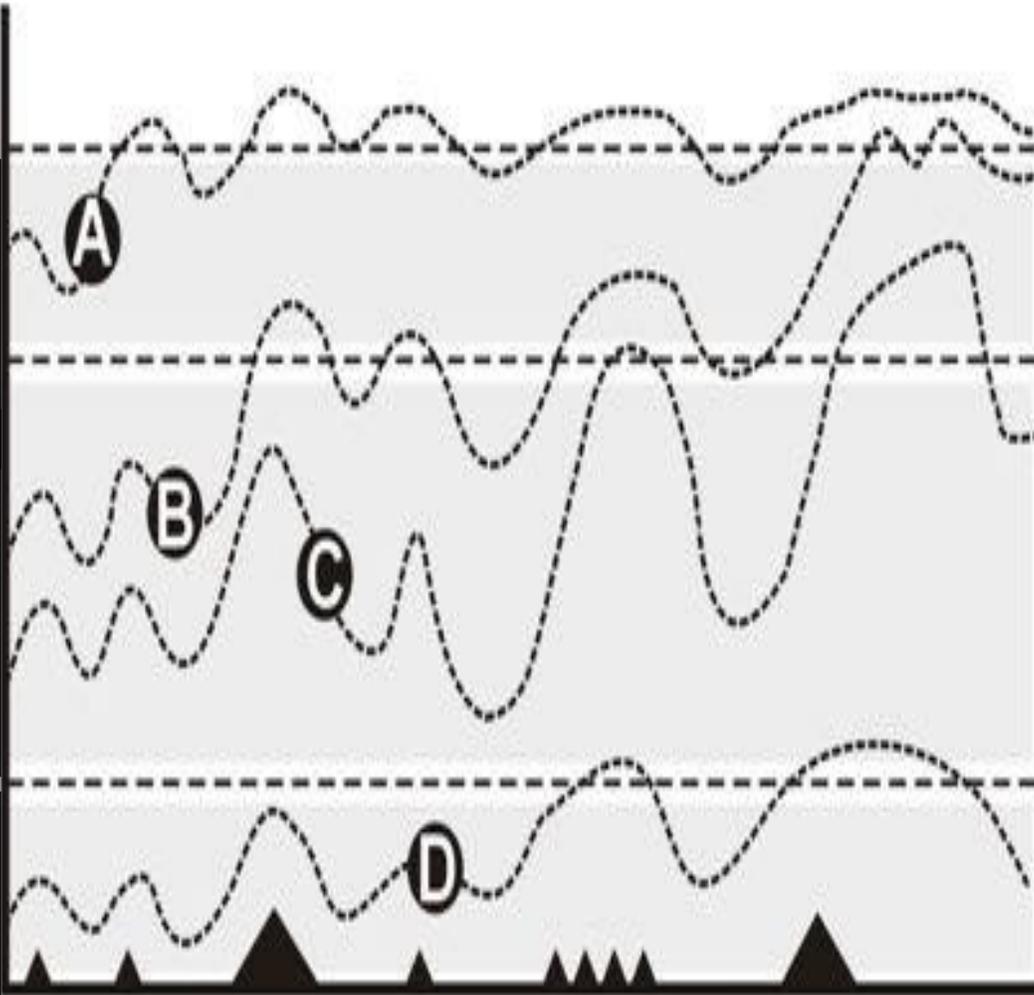
Emotional Regulation –

how we adjust our internal state to cope with the external demands

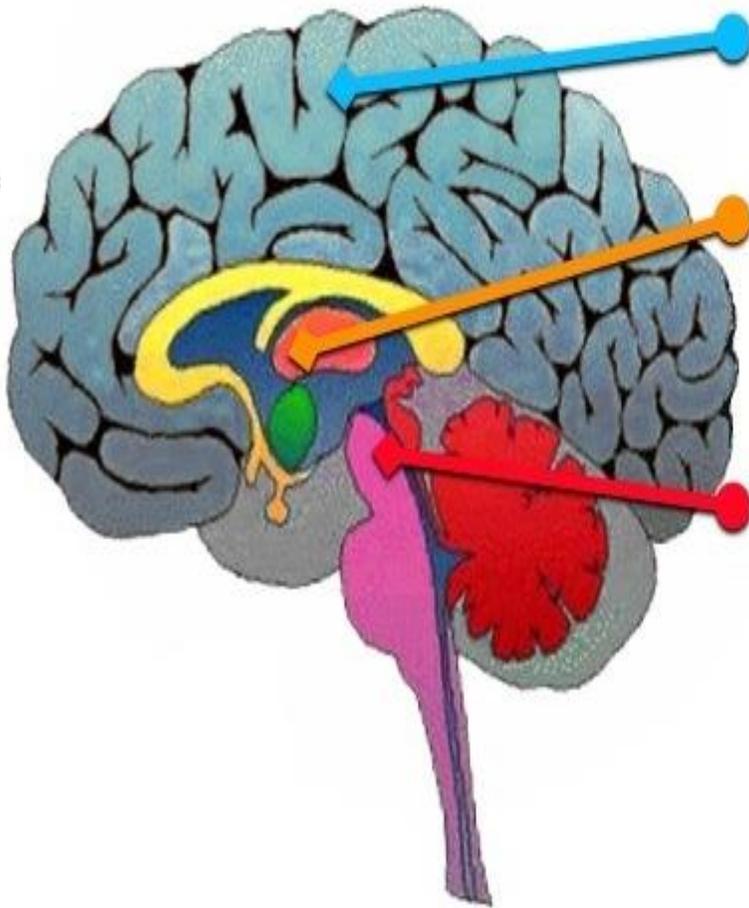
**Dys-regulation
Feeling
overwhelmed
and acting this
out**

**regulation =
Being able to
be rationale
and access our
thinking brains**

**Dys-regulation
Feeling
overwhelmed
and closing
down**



Processing of emotional self regulation over time



'Thinking brain'

- Calm
- Abstract and creative in your thinking
- Can think about the world, other people and their needs
- Can think about the future and past

'Alarm System'

- Anger, anxiety, fear
- Reactive
- Can only think about yourself
- Can only think about the here and now

Autonomic system

- Terror
- Automatic
- Body Integrity – concern is for keeping your body safe
- Physical self – hunger, thirst, sleep, noise, heat
- Loss of sense of time

STOPP

- STOP

Just pause for a moment

- TAKE A BREATH

- Pay attention to your breathing as you breathe in and out

- OBSERVE

- What are you reacting to?
- What sensations do you notice in your body?

- PULL BACK – PUT IN SOME PERSPECTIVE

- What's the bigger picture? What's going on?

- PRACTICE WHAT WORKS

- What's the best thing to do right now?



Breathing Techniques

When we are experiencing intense emotions, our breathing often becomes more rapid or we hold our breath. We can calm ourselves down by deliberately slowing and relaxing our breathing

Almost immediately, blood pressure drops, your expression softens, and tension drains from your body.

- Breathe in slowly and steadily through your nose for a count of 4
- Pause for a count of 1
- Breathe out through your mouth for a count of 4 (slowly and steadily)
- Repeat this exercise for as long as you need. If your mind wanders whilst you do this exercise, bring your attention back to how it feels to breathe in and out.



Top tips for parents

- Stress is not a bad thing as long as its appropriate, manageable and we get a break from it
- Build relationship when not at crisis point
- Take your time to work out the best approach
- Think about your own stress levels and emotional regulation – notice if you or your child's alarm system has been triggered
- Acknowledge, acknowledge, acknowledge – let your child off load, process their feelings, feel heard and understood – You don't need to rush in with advice or reassurance
- Notice the tone of your voice when your are communicating and what you are communicating non verbally
- Start each day afresh
- Give choices
- If your child is feeling overwhelmed help them to choose one 'do-able' activity for the day
- Use 'I' not 'you'
- Use 'and' not 'but'
- Get the basics right – sleep, nutrition, hydration, exercise, having fun

Useful resources

- Relaxation exercises from the mental health foundation
- <https://soundcloud.com/mentalhealthfoundation/sets/wellbeing-podcasts>
- <https://soundcloud.com/mentalhealthfoundation/stress-and-relaxation-full?in=mentalhealthfoundation/sets/wellbeing-podcasts>

Sheffield CAMHS website for young people

www.epicfriends.co.uk

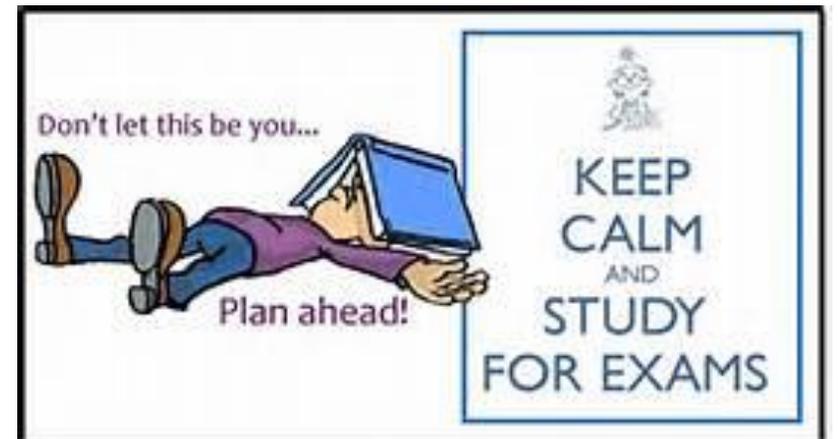
The screenshot shows the homepage of the EPIC FRIENDS website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the text "EPIC FRIENDS" and four icons: a house labeled "HOME", a network diagram labeled "COMMON ISSUES", a person on a surfboard labeled "SELF-HELP", and a checklist labeled "TAKE THE QUIZ". To the right of the navigation bar, there is a green bar with the text "SPREAD THE WORD" and social media icons for Twitter (156) and Facebook (Like).

Below the navigation bar, there is a main section with the text "Mental health issues with young people are **common**". The word "common" is written in white inside a pink speech bubble. To the right of the speech bubble, there are several phrases: "feel stressed", "fed up", "Anxiety", "weight concerns", "DEPRESSION", "SELF HARM", and "PSYCHOSIS". Below this section, there are two call-to-action boxes. The first box is titled "Learn how to help your friends" and contains the text "Find out about the most common teenage mental health issues, how to spot them and how to help". The second box is titled "Take the epic friendship quiz" and contains the text "Discover where your friendship strengths lie by whizzing through our Facebook quiz now!".

1. The will to win means nothing without the will to prepare

Juma Ikangaa

Encourage them to be organised, prioritise learning and follow a realistic revision programme. Don't leave things until the last minute.



2. Make learning part of the culture at home

Be interested in what your child is learning – conversations about the subject helps them to embed their learning - just listening attentively helps them to process what they have revised

Pin up their revision and exam timetable on the noticeboard in the kitchen and work around it.



3. Support and encourage a work/life balance



Having something to look forward to is a great motivator. 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.



4. Good nights sleep

Sleep helps to embed learning

1. Avoid caffeine.
2. No electronic screens 45 minutes before sleep.
3. Sleep-inducing environment (dark, quiet, cool).
4. Soothing, relaxing pre-sleep routine.
5. Go to sleep when you are tired.
6. Don't check the clock.
7. Open the curtains in the morning.
8. Regular, consistent pattern (8 hours).
9. Avoid naps after 5pm.
10. Exercise earlier in the day.



5. Look out for them and notice when they are working hard

1. If they are looking overwhelmed encourage them to take a break and relax.
2. Remember exams are stressful! Avoid getting drawn into arguments or negativity.
3. Notice when they are working hard and make sure you tell them!
4. Always be calm and positive.



When a person is down in the world, an ounce of help is better than a pound of preaching.

Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton

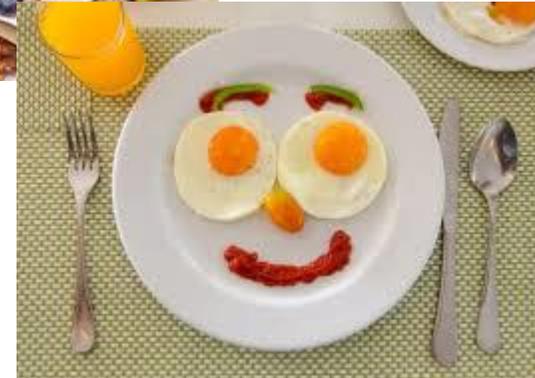
6. Check in with and give time for your child to tell you how they are feeling



- People sitting exams are often tense and ratty and telling people how they feel avoids that ‘what’s wrong?’ ‘nothing!’ conversation.
- Encourage them to get 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.
- If you notice they are starting to feel overwhelmed encourage taking a break, time to relax and talking to someone.

7. Keep them well nourished

1. Eat a healthy balanced diet.
2. Keep hydrated.
3. Avoid excessive caffeine, especially late at night.
4. Eat breakfast in the morning before an exam.
5. Encourage them to look after themselves – remember exams are more of a marathon than a sprint.



8. Help put exams into perspective



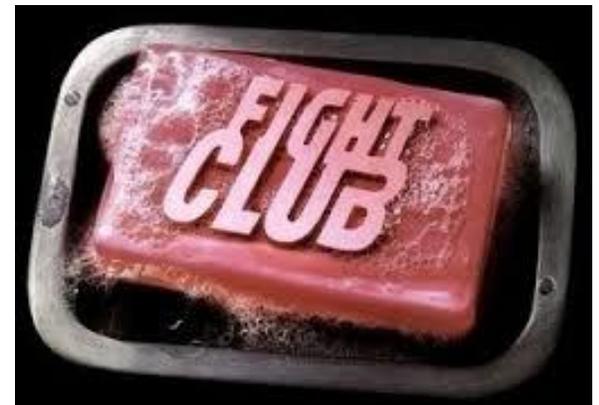
Tell them:

‘You are not your exams. You are not your exam results. You are not your Nikes or your Xbox or your iPhone. Things that are important to you – seeing friends, spending time with family, enjoying hobbies and everything else that makes you **YOU** is the stuff that will keep you going.’

NEVER LET **SUCCESS**
GET TO YOUR **HEAD**.
NEVER LET **FAILURE**
GET TO YOUR **HEART**.

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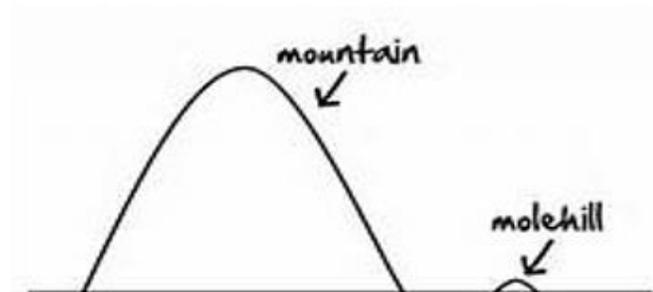
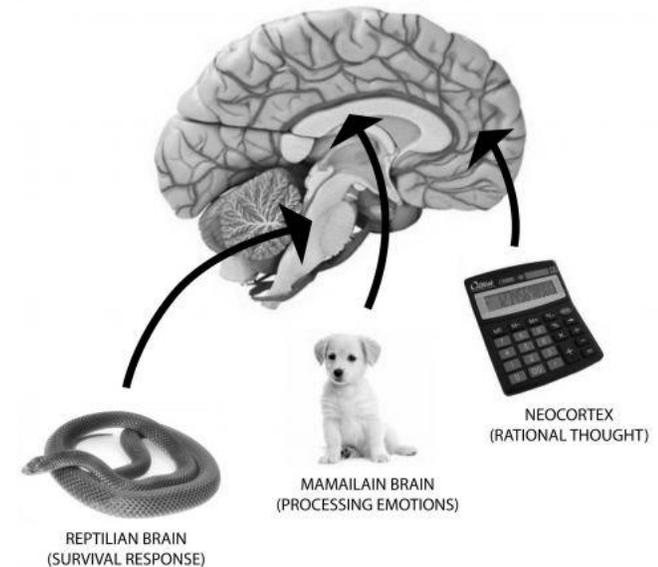
Fight Club



Key points to take with you

- **Remember the three brains** – the reptilian brain is good for survival but lousy for exam success. Encourage and remind them to use their thinking brain!
- Key is **emotional regulation** and avoiding getting to a point where they feel overwhelmed! (This will be different for each of us).
- Try the **mindfulness techniques** with them!
- **Give time to chat** about how they are feeling and what they are learning.
- **Practice** and **struggle** will help in the long run.
- We are continually shaping our minds and developing our brains.
- **Remember there is more to life than just exams!**

THE THREE BRAINS



School Support

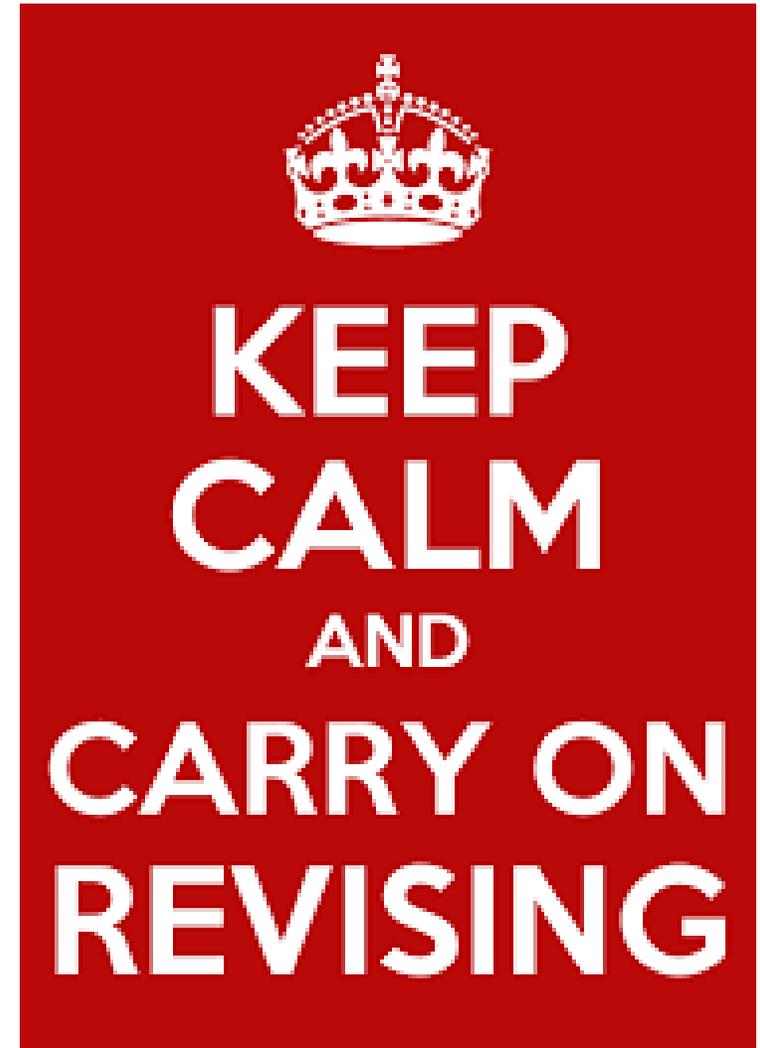
Focus is always on **how to best support the student** in terms of accessing learning, performing at their optimum in exams, supporting their MHWB and making the next steps in their life.

- Form Tutors
- Year Managers
- Staff Healthy Minds Champions
- Subject teachers
- SEND
- Wellbeing and Engagement Worker
- School website with links to advice, guidance and support



Top study/revision tips

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVlvxHJdql8>





Tapton
SCHOOL