

Working together to reduce Examination Anxiety

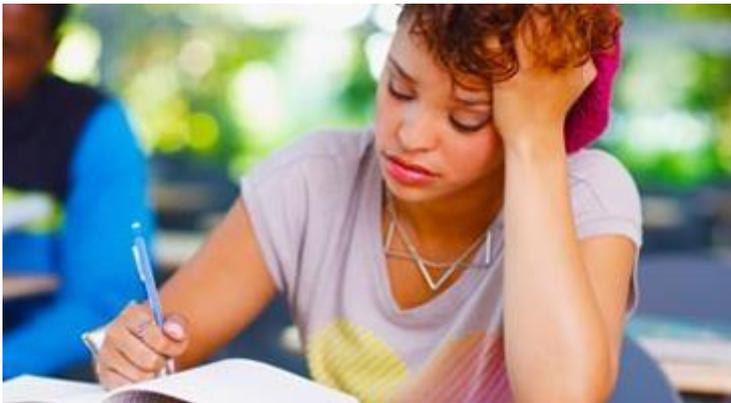
Tests and exams, including GCSEs, can be a challenging part of school life for both children and parents. But there are ways to ease the stress.

Watch out for examination stress

Look out for signs of exam stress. Children who experience stress may be irritable, not sleep well, lose interest in food, worry a lot and appear depressed or negative. Headaches and stomach pains can also be stress-related (reassurance from a parent that this is part of the process that they may feel like this can really elevate the anxiety increasing)

Having someone to talk to about their work can help. Support from a parent, tutor or study buddy can help children air their worries and keep things in perspective, (try to help your child identify someone who they feel they can talk to, it isn't always the parent it could be a aunt or family friend, encourage them to find this person)

If you feel your child isn't coping, talk to their teachers at school, (but share with your child that you feel you need to do this)



Ensure your child eats well

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

Some parents find that too many high-fat, high-sugar and high-caffeine foods and drinks (such as cola, sweets, chocolate, burgers and chips) make their children hyperactive, irritable and moody. This can also affect their ability to revise, retain information and perform in examinations.

Encourage sleep

Good sleep will improve thinking and concentration. Most teenagers need between eight and 10 hours' sleep a night. Allow half an hour or so for kids 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 hours of panicky last-minute study, (ensure they use their School Revision Schedule template - look at the exams that are first and try to make an order of study). Try also to find ways to help relax your child and not let them study past say 8pm at night.

Be flexible

Research advises parents to 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. Students will pick up on your own anxiety so try not to talk about them relating to exams around them or where they could over hear you.

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Help them to study

Help your child to revise by making sure they have somewhere comfortable to study. Perhaps break up their revision by asking them if there is anyone they study well with and encourage structured/boundaries study groups.

Discuss their nerves

Remind your child that feeling nervous is normal. Nervousness is a natural reaction to exams.

The key is to put these nerves to positive use. Being reminded of what they do know and the time they have put into study can help them feel confident. (Your child may find the most inopportune time to talk to you, try not to dismiss, by giving them the time they may really open up and share their fears, busy family life can get in the way of this but 5 minutes can really help a child under stress)

Encourage exercise

Make sure your kids are active. Exercise can help boost energy levels, clear the mind and relieve stress. Walking, cycling, swimming, football and dancing are all effective and are great for releasing endorphins.

Don't add to the pressure

Support group Child Line says that many of the children who contact them feel that the greatest pressure at exam time comes from their family.

"Keep things in perspective, listen to them, give support and avoid criticism."

Before they go in for a test or exam, be reassuring and positive. Make sure they know that failing isn't the end of the world, and that 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. Then move on and focus on the next test, rather than dwelling on things that can't be changed.

Make time for treats

When the exams are over or during periods of heavy revision, help celebrate with a treat. These can be a real encouragement for the next time they have a test.

Don't use rewards as bribes. Instead, encourage them to work for their own satisfaction, offering small, frequent treats.