

Help your child beat exam stress

Tests and exams can be a challenging part of school life for children and young people and their parents or carers. But there are ways to ease the stress.

Watch for signs of stress

Children and 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, tutor or study buddy can help young people share their worries and keep things in perspective.

Encourage your child to talk to 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. Try to involve your child as much as possible.

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. 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. Where possible involve your child in shopping for food and encourage them to choose some healthy snacks.

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 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 a few hours of panicky last-minute study.

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.

Help them to study

Make sure your child has somewhere comfortable to study. Ask them how you can best support them with their revision.

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.

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.

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.

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.