

Coping With Exams

For many teenagers who are studying at school or college the time of exams is very stressful and difficult. Some exam pressure is inevitable, but parents can do much to support and encourage their son or daughter through this time.

When will my teenager take exams?

The numbers of exams young people are taking has increased in recent years. In the UK (except Scotland, where different testing arrangements are in place), pupils sit national curriculum tests, popularly known as SATs, in the core subjects of English, maths science at age 14.

GCSE pupils may sit as many as 40 exams and the new A-Level curriculum has also introduced extra opportunities for assessment. Some children's charities have reported rises in the number of pupils contacting them at exam time because of stress.

Why do teenagers come under such stress?

So much of a teenager's future seems to depend on success in exams that stress seems guaranteed. Many teenagers are afraid of failing, but they are also worried about letting their parents and family down.

The body behind the SATs in England – the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) – says pressure is often put upon children by their parents.

If you can reassure your teenager that as long as he does his best you will be happy, that may help to reduce his anxiety.

How can I help my teenager prepare for exams?

A key area where you can support your teenager is to help set up good study habits.

- Make sure they have a quiet, calm place to do their work
- Set aside specific times to work and do not allow them to be interrupted
- Help him to organise files and books
- Remind him that spending time on his weaknesses – the areas he is not good at – may pay more
- Suggest he uses index cards to make notes – they are easy to revise from and can be used for quick revision before an exam

Encourage A-Level students to copy out any notes they have taken within 24 hours. If they leave out anything they don't understand, they can then ask a friend or teacher about it while it's fresh. This will mean that when they come to revise, the material has been assimilated, reviewed and reorganised. Many experts believe that students need to write about subjects in order to fully understand their significance.

Helping my teenager revise

Revision is the key to making sure your teenager does his best, It is not always as easy to revise as it is to learn the work in the first place any many teenagers feel that they are facing an uphill task alone. During the revision period for exams parents can help their teenagers with the necessary assistance and motivation to revise productively.

Encourage your teenager to plan a revision timetable. Do this about six weeks before the exams start. This will help her to break the work up into manageable chunks and work systematically. Teachers can also help with this and some schools will issue revision lists and suggested timetables.

If your teenager has worries or concerns about specific subjects or topics, encourage him to speak to his teacher at an early stage. Advice about areas to concentrate on or suggestions of extra work can help him to manage the workload. Encourage your teenager to check that he has all the correct notes, essays and texts to revise from.

Explain to your teenager that prolonged slogging isn't as effective as short intensive spurts. Suggest that they do around 50 minutes at a time, with a 10-minute break. About four or five hours of new learning in a day is enough.

Remind your teenager to work on all areas, not just the ones he likes. It's very easy to ignore the areas he finds difficult and they can easily crop up in the exams.

Help her to organise files and books for revision

In between study sessions, encourage her to do some aerobic exercise. Take her for a swim or a bike ride. Exercise will lower stress levels generally, as your teenager lets off some steam.

Encourage him to eat small amounts often and offer lots of carbohydrates – bread, pasta and potatoes for energy. Don't have a lot of sugar. Caffeine is OK, in moderation.

It is important that teenagers are not tired when they sit the tests, so encourage some early nights. If your teenager has a problem sleeping and feels tired as a result, then suggest a 20-30 minute nap in the afternoon. She doesn't have to fall asleep, but can rest without

interruption. Tell her to close her eyes, breathe slowly and relax. If she worries about getting enough sleep at night, it may make her feel better to know that she has already had a couple of hours in the afternoon.

Once he has learnt the information you could offer to test him. You could also suggest that he revises with a friend for a while – then they can test each other.

Encourage your teenager to use all resources possible – libraries, the web, family friends, a set of revision guides and seek support from anyone who may be able to help.

Teachers will listen to their pupils' concerns about stress – if your teenager seems to be getting overwhelmed, encourage her to talk to teachers about ways to manage her workload.

How Can I help My Teenager at Exam Time?

On the day of the exam:

- Make sure he gets up in plenty of time so he's not rushing and has time to eat breakfast. He won't be able to concentrate if his stomach is rumbling
- Encourage her to take five minutes to check she has everything she needs, like extra pens and pencils, calculators and maths equipment
- Remind him not to discuss the details of the exam just before he goes in. Someone will always know something he doesn't
- Say, "don't panic, don't worry – just do your best." Tell her to say it to herself during an exam as often as she needs to. And if he does his best, be happy with the results – whatever they are.

Further Information and Help

Schoolzone:

Links to useful websites to help with studies

www.schoolzone.co.uk

Childline:

Telephone helpline and factsheets on issues affecting teenagers.

tel: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Pupiline

Lively website created by pupils for pupils, with advice and forums, including one on exam pressure.

www.pupiline.net

The following are also valuable sources of learning and revision:

www.learn.co.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/education