

Supporting your child with exam stress- some helpful tips for parents

The main tips included are:

Watch for signs of stress - try to meet irritability with curiosity about how they are coping. Most parents are aware of how conflict can escalate with their child. Whilst they might endeavour to resist this, it can be difficult in the moment. The exam period is a time to really practice supporting young people with avoiding conflict where possible.

Make sure your child eats well – Many of us see the impact of stress on our diet, whether that looks like eating less, eating less regularly or less healthily. Some of the foods that we are most drawn to when we are stressed (e.g. high sugar, high fat, high caffeine) can have a negative impact on our mood. Ask young people what their favourite healthier snacks are and where possible have them available during exam time.

Help your child get enough sleep – Encourage the young person to commit to getting more sleep in the lead up to and during exams. Help them to set up a winding down routine. This could look like: - encouraging them to have a goal of no screens an hour before bed - a bed time drink that helps set the routine (no caffeine), stopping revision by a certain time, - if worry is a particular problem, encourage the young person to write their worries down a few hours before bed, committing to leave them behind for the evening so that they can get the rest that they need to face the next day as best as possible, build in something relaxing before bed such as a bath or stretching, perhaps a relaxing music playlist.

Be flexible during exams- Acknowledge that exams are difficult and let young people know that they may not be able to do all the things that they usually do. Whilst this might look like missing out on some fun things, in order to make time to revise, it can also look like being more forgiving about chores during this time. Exams do not last forever. It is not about “letting them off” but genuinely appreciating the task they are taking on. Is there one thing that you could offer the young person some extra flexibility with?

Help them study – This could look like: - supporting young people to study with friends in study groups - offering to revise with them using flash cards, - offering to help them make a revision timetable, - offering to be their student so that they can try to teach you about an exam topic.

Talk about exam nerves – Help young people to understand that nerves are normal and to be expected. Praise that it is positive that they want to do well whilst reminding them that too much worry can get in the way. Remind them of the hard work they have put in already and that you can help with studying.

Encourage exercise during exams – One way of validating the hard work that young people are putting in, is to encourage taking a break and looking after themselves. Exercise is a great way to feel more energised and to relieve stress and anxiety – even a ten-minute walk is worth it!

Do not add to the pressure – Some of the most helpful ways to support young people to do their best in exams are included here. Sometimes our own anxiety about how young people will do in their exams may lead us to repeatedly emphasising the importance of exams to young people. This can increase anxiety and may leave young people feeling that the effort they are making is not acknowledged.

Supporting your child with exam stress- some helpful tips for parents

Make time for treats – treats don't only have to be a reward. Treats can be a great gesture of recognition that a young person is navigating a difficult time and likely trying their best. A note saying that you are proud of them or leaving their favourite chocolate bar in their room can be an easy way to show a child that you are thinking of and supporting them. An end of exams treat can be motivating for young people to look forward to – think with them about what would be exciting and realistic.