

# The Exam Survival Guide

*A parents' guide*

To do list:

# Assisting with revision

Talk to your child about how you can support them and what they would find helpful.

The simplest things often get in the way of starting revision: weeks can be lost while students are “going to get some folders soon...” Ensure that your child has all the right equipment to revise. A ‘workbox’ with pens, rulers, paper, pads etc can be really useful and is one less tactic they can use to avoid revision. You may consider buying new stationery, highlighters and pens to make revision more interesting.

Ensure that your child has a suitable study environment: students need a quiet, organised and well lit space to study for exams.

Support your child in choosing one good revision guide for each subject: it’s the best investment you will make. There are lots around so check with the teacher yourself if you are not sure which is the best.

The secret to doing well in exams lies in planning. You can help your child to create a clear revision plan and method of studying that will make them feel in control of their work.

Support your child in sticking to their revision plan and keeping to the start and finish times they have agreed. Praise them when they do it, and, if necessary, agree a reward structure. Don’t make treats dependent on certain results: it will only add to their feelings of disappointment if they don’t do as well as expected.

Be flexible: if they want to go out to a party on a revision night, agree when they will make up the time.

Be sensitive to the pressure your child is feeling: let them know that if they are really not up to it on odd days, it isn’t the end of the world. Let it go when it really matters to them, and remind them of all the good work they have done, and will continue to do. It’s the big picture that will count in the end.

Provide favourite snacks and water for revision periods.

Keep up with regular ‘check ins’ and don’t nag in between times. Show an interest in how revision is going, talk through any difficulties and be prepared to help them reschedule their planning as necessary.

Keep things in perspective: your child may not be doing things the way you would do them, or as often as you would like, but they are doing the best they can in the way that works for them at the stage they are at.

Encourage your child to attend all revision sessions provided by the college: this will make the process of revision much easier.

Variety makes revision much more interesting: talk to your child about how they will approach their revision and encourage them to make use of online materials and revision websites alongside their own notes and materials supplied by their teachers.

# Dealing with stress

A degree of stress is normal and inevitable for students tackling exams.

Some of the symptoms of stress are listed below. However, you know your child best so any marked changes in behaviour are worth checking out:

- Difficulty getting to sleep or difficulty waking up in the morning
- Constant tiredness
- Forgetfulness
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Poor appetite
- Loss of interest in activities
- Increased anxiety and irritability
- Increased heart rate
- Migraines/headaches
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness

Be prepared to listen to your child: having someone to talk to about their work can really help. Support from a parent or carer will be invaluable during stressful times. Acknowledge their worries and concerns and then talk them through. Try and ensure that they are keeping things in perspective.

One of the best way to support your child during the stress of revision and exams is to make home life as calm and pleasant as possible. It helps if other members of the household are aware that your child may be under pressure and that allowances should be made for this

If your child is stressed, try to encourage them to take time out away from work, doing something that they enjoy. Exercise promotes hormones that actively counter stress, so try to encourage this. Ensure your child eats well, and let them know that you're always there to listen (try not to offer immediate solutions to worries or to give advice, unless they ask for it- what stressed people most need is somebody to listen and empathise with the feelings they express)

Try not to nag or make too many demands on your child during exam time. Arguments are counter-productive and will only add unnecessary stress and distract from revision.

Speak to your child's tutor or teachers if you are worried. Your child's teachers know what is happening at school and how your child is progressing in all subject areas. They are there to provide guidance and help when your son or daughter needs it.

# Getting through the exam season

The exam period can be very stressful for pupils. Encourage your child to keep a positive perspective- soon they will be on the other side of the ‘exam mountain’.

Try not to add to the stress levels in the house by ‘rising to the bait’ when your child pushes the limits. None of us are at our best under stress and it’s likely that behaviour will be challenging during this time. Pick your battles carefully, shelving any issues that are not of immediate importance. Now is not the time to bring up the issue of the untidy bedroom or the washing up being left again.

Ensure that your child is prepared for the exam and talk through where and when it is, what they need to take etc. On the day of the exam, make sure you have a watch and supplies of pens, pencils etc.

Try to keep routines the same, and not to introduce any instability unless it is absolutely necessary. On exam days try to ensure they have a good breakfast (suggest a banana or a source of energy food for first thing).

It's important to get a good night's sleep before an exam, so discourage your child from staying up late to cram. Also make sure he or she eats a good breakfast on the morning of the exam.

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.

Before the exam remind them that you love and value them whatever happens. Remind them of any strategies they have for keeping calm, and wish them GOOD LUCK!

Pin a copy of the examination timetable on the kitchen notice board. You should also note the date and time of each paper. Make sure you are at all times aware when your son or daughter has to be in college.

It sounds ridiculous, but with both parents working in many homes, it can happen that someone forgets to wake the student. Make sure they are up and dressed each morning before you leave the house.

Make a final check each morning before you leave home that your son or daughter is fully prepared for the day's exams. Writing instruments, along with the other requirements such as rulers, erasers, calculators etc should be checked, along with reading glasses etc.

When they have taken an exam, help celebrate with a small treat. These can be a real encouragement for the next time they have an exam and helps reduce stress.