

Parent Guide to Supporting your child with GCSE Revision

Many studies have shown students with parents who take on a more active role in their child's education generally do better in exams than students whose parents don't. And the great news is that you don't need to be an expert to become involved. There are a variety of ways you can help to prepare your child for their GCSE exams. You can play a huge part in motivating your child just by giving unwavering support, offering constant encouragement and showing interest.

Understanding the Importance of GCSE Revision

It is also important to not leave revision to the last minute. The earlier your child starts their GCSE revision, the better. Many students underestimate the time needed for proper revision; this adds more stress and anxiety to the situation because they begin to overextend themselves to make up for the lack of time.

Here is a simple way to work out the least amount of revision time needed: For one GCSE subject, allow 1 hour of revision per topic. Therefore, the least amount of revision time needed for one subject is "1 hour X total number of topics". If a subject covers 50 topics, then that subject would require at least 50 hours of revision time. If your child is doing 8 subjects, he/she would need at least 400 hours of studying. Then, set aside 3 hours every day for revision. Your son/daughter will therefore need to start revising at least 5 months before the GCSE exams to cover all topics.

Do this exercise with your child to let them appreciate the number of hours it will take to revise their subjects and understand why it will benefit them to begin GCSE revision at the earliest possible time.

Planning GCSE Revision Time

Teenagers are not known to be the most organised individuals but effective revision first begins with organisation. So parents, hopefully you are more organised than your child and can assist them with planning their revision time.

There is the erroneous belief that "serious revision" equates to studying hours on end. Marathon studying sessions are certainly not recommended. Encourage 30-45 minute revision sessions with short breaks in between. Optimally, students should study for no more than 4 hours per day. Studying for long stretches of hours is counterproductive because the brain will become tired, they will experience difficulty in focusing and increasingly less and less information will be retained. The fundamental principle to revising is to do it habitually and constantly, little chunks at a time. A student who studies for 2 hours 7 days a week would be much better off than a student who studies 10 hours straight on Saturday and Sunday.

Revision planning begins with creating a revision timetable. To be consistent, students should strive to study at least 5 days of the week. On weekdays, this time would be after school and the choice is theirs on weekends. Advise your child to breakdown the subjects by topics; so revising Mathematics on Tuesday night becomes revising quadratic equations instead. Give priority to the subjects and topics that are most difficult; this means placing them early on in the timetable and allowing more revision time.

Sometimes, it's good to plan a night off. This can be every other week. On these "off" nights, let your child have fun and relax. Maybe watch a movie or have a friend over. Allow them the opportunity to be stress-free in this stressful GCSE period.

Weekly Revision Feedback

At the end of each study week, you can have conversations about the revision progress. Make it interesting so that it doesn't feel like an interrogation; maybe get coloured note cards – red, yellow and green. On the red cards, have them right down the topics that are still difficult, on the yellow cards the topics they are beginning to understand but still need more revising, and on the green cards the topics that they are really comfortable with. At the end of every week, have your child assess their progress, creating new colour cards for topics. Make sure to praise them when a topic goes from a red card to a yellow card and from a yellow card to a green card.

Encourage them to do as many past papers as possible. If you are able, offer to correct these "mock exams" using the marking schemes.

Revision in the Home Environment

Most revising will be done at home; having a good environment while studying will help your child stay focused. Ensure that they have a quiet and private place in the home to revise. A simple desk and chair in their room can suffice. Or it can even be at the dining table. Whatever space it is, make it their private zone at revision time and keep the distractions to a minimum.

If there are other siblings in the house, ensure that they respect the revision time of the sibling doing their GCSEs. Keep the television turned down, no loud music and certainly no arguments. To show solidarity, you can make this a quiet period for the entire family – reading books or having other children study too.

GCSE Revision Styles and Methods

Revision boils down to personal preference – what works best for the individual? It is not just about reading a textbook. There are many interesting revision methods your child can include in their daily routine. People learn in different ways and revision methods should reflect their preference.

Have a look at the revision tips booklet on our website and talk to your child about their preferred style. If revision is to be effective it must be suitably challenging, test recall, and be effectively spaced.

Healthy Child, Healthy Mind, Productive Revision

Stress and anxiety from GCSE preparation can take a mental, physical and emotional toll on your child. To combat this, you need to feed them the right foods and encourage them to be active individuals. A healthy mind and body will also help them be focused in school and concentrate when it is revision time.

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 ways 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.

Final Tips for GCSE Revision

Everyone falls behind sometimes, and feel demotivated, overwhelmed and lost. Be quick to notice these signs in your child and offer help; don't make the situation worse by berating them or calling them lazy.

Have an open door policy where they can talk to you at any time. Listen to their concerns. Let them talk freely about their issues and struggles. Take their minds off GCSE for a moment by taking them out, letting them do the things that they enjoy or cooking their favourite meals. Reassure them that you love them unconditionally.

Here are some more tips to help minimise your child's anxiety:

- Always encourage your child to ask for help at school on any parts of their work they do not understand.
- Be positive even if they aren't.
- Stay supportive.
- End every conversation on a good note.
- Cut back on their chores to afford them sufficient study time.
- Offer praise and treats when they have reached revision milestones.
- Have regular one to one conversations. Let your child talk more than you and be attentive.
- Regularly inquire if they need anything of you.

GCSE Revision In The Final Days

Get your own timetable to know the dates and times of each exam. Avoid disagreements and arguments in the days leading up to the exams, the less stressed they are, the better relaxed they will be. Don't grill them after exams. A smile and a simple "How did it go?" will do.

Remember GCSE is only one part of their life. Prepare to support them in their life's goal regardless of the result. At this moment, your son/daughter may have a lot of insecurities and uncertainty, always assure them that you will love and support them no matter what.