

ADVICE for Parents of Students taking State Exams

With mock exam results back, and exams looming, stress levels will be soaring for parents of Junior and Leaving Cert students. Exam stress can be tough on the whole household.

Facing into exams? Read some tips on how to reduce stress.

So how can they avoid feeling too overwhelmed and under pressure to focus and what can you do to help them? What can be done to relieve some of the stress? We have compiled our Top Tips to avoid stress and relieve some of the pressure on our teenagers undertaking important exams. Pass these tips on to anyone who is preparing for exams at the moment.

Source of Stress

Exams are stressful for students due to the unknown as well as fear of failure and work volume. If the issue is fear of failure, it is important to lower or clarify expectations for the teenager so the exams seem more achievable. However, if the issue is that they are overwhelmed by the workload, breaking down into manageable chunks is helpful and setting achievable targets with a study plan. Getting mock exam results back is an anxious time for any student, especially those who are struggling with the workload. It is important to remind your child that mock exams are only that, a dress rehearsal for the main event in June. Most teachers will aim to finish their course by Easter and spend the last term revising. There is still time to turn things around. Let students know that you are there for them no matter how they do.

General exam stress tips:

- Believe in yourself!
Remind them that they are capable of succeeding in their exam. They have studied the subject for many years and of course have the ability to do it. After all those classes, they have learned so much that they are capable of getting through the exam.
- Relationship building!
Focus on the relationship, not the study and as you deepen your relationship with your teenager, it becomes safe for them to share their worries and concerns.
- Don't just worry – take action!
If the student doesn't understand some of their course material, getting stressed out won't help. Instead, encourage them to take action by seeing their teacher or asking class mates to help them to understand the problem.
- Talk to a friend
Confiding in someone you trust and who will listen and be supportive is a great way of reducing stress and worry. Encourage the student to talk to a friend, relative or parent to help to talk things through. Often what seems like an overwhelming problem can be manageable when you talk it through with someone else. There is lots of support available in school they can talk to a Guidance Counsellor / Chaplain.
- Don't put yourself under too much pressure
Encourage your son/daughter to aim to do their best and be assured that it is the effort they make and not the result that makes the difference. Not getting a top grade does not mean failure and tell them that you will support them because of their effort rather than the results.

Tips for the revision period:

- Time is of the essence!
Encourage them to: make a **PLAN** when they are going to study, when they are going to spend time with family and friends, prioritise topics they know they must study for in each subject and use exam papers to revise, practice & assist with time management
- Fun is as important as work.
It is vital that the student builds in time to have fun and relax in between study sessions. Help them to develop a timetable that will help them to plan and track and monitor their progress and also includes regular activities of relaxation and 'play'.
- Take a break.
Encourage your son/daughter to know when they need a break. If they find that they are losing concentration, they should take a short break – go for a walk, talk to a friend or just listen to some music. When they resume study, they will feel refreshed and able to concentrate on revision again.
- Another cuppa? Don't think so.
Discourage drinking too much coffee, tea and fizzy drinks; the caffeine will make them feel 'keyed-up' and make thinking less clear. Try some herbal teas, water or milk as an alternative,
- Eat some 'superfoods'.
Get them to eat healthily and regularly. Their brain will benefit from the nutrients. Replace sweets and sugar with 'superfoods' such as berries, bananas, oily fish, nuts and broccoli. 'Superfoods' can help boost concentration, energy and mood.
- Exercise the body as well as the mind!
Regular moderate exercise such as a brisk walk, swim or session in the gym will boost energy, clear the mind and help reduce any feelings of stress.
- **Encourage them to COME TO SCHOOL ALL DAY EVERY DAY!!** All the supports they need are here. They can easily access the teachers and notes they need. Being present makes it easier for everyone. It is a sign of solidarity that gives us all strength. Together we can succeed

Tips for keeping calm during the exam:

- Try to avoid panic.
It's natural to feel some exam nerves prior to starting the exam and that can be a positive and motivating feeling. However, getting excessively nervous is counterproductive as it hinders the ability to think clearly. Encourage your son/daughter to practice deep breathing. The quickest and most effective way of eliminating feelings of stress and panic is to close your eyes and take several long, slow deep breaths. Breathing in this way calms your whole nervous system. Encourage and help your son/daughter to master the art of deep breathing and use it when required.
- Blankety blank?
Talk through what to do if your son/daughters mind goes blank. Remember, the best thing for them to do is not to panic - it just makes it harder to recall information. Instead, focus on slow, deep breathing for about one minute. If they still can't remember the information then they should move on to another question and return to this question later.
- No Post Mortems!
Don't spend time holding a 'post mortem' into completed exams and where they may have gone wrong. Often we are our own harshest critics. Encourage them instead to congratulate themselves for the answers they feel confident about, learn from the bits where they feel they could have done better, and then move on.

Best wishes to all from the Guidance Department