



Supporting Young People's Wellbeing During Exams

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Looking out for warning signs



Exams are an understandably stressful time for young people, so some level of anxiety and low mood can be expected. It's important to be aware of any warning signs they might be struggling with the pressure.

Consider the onset, frequency and duration of these warning signs - we all have bad days and it's easy to hit a roadblock in revision.



Fight your 'Righting Reflex'

When children and young people share a worry or express emotions such as frustration or upset, it's natural to offer reassurance, encourage them to think more positively or to suggest solutions.

Don't worry about it, I'm sure you did your best!

It couldn't have been that bad - just speak to them and I'm sure it will clear things up.

There's no need to get worked up about it, nothing bad is going to happen!

But sometimes, this can leave them feeling dismissed; like their worries and feelings don't matter. Think about when you were a teenager: what responses from the adults around you were helpful? What type of responses made you feel like they were not really listening to you or taking you seriously?

When a young person opens up about difficult feelings, help them feel heard and understood with these four strategies

Summarise

So you've been feeling overwhelmed for a while and it sounds like you're struggling with motivation, is that right?

That sounds like it was really upsetting for you - it must have been difficult. I'm sorry you've had such a tough day.

Validate

Empathise

It makes sense you are feeling stressed at the moment - a lot has been going on.

It probably feels like this is only happening to you, but a lot of young people feel like that at the moment - you're definitely not alone.

Normalise



Fight your 'Righting Reflex' and take some time to show them that you really hear them. Sometimes, this listening and understanding is exactly what they need. If there is a problem to be solved, you can do this together: asking them what they would find helpful.

Encourage a balanced view

When young people have a persistent worry or negative thought, we can help them challenge it using the 'Ask, don't tell' strategy. Getting them to question the worry for themselves can feel more relevant to them and also teaches them that they don't have to believe everything they think!

What is it that's worrying you?

What makes you think that?

What else could be true?

Is that a fact or just a thought?
How do you know?

How likely is that to happen? (0-100%)

What else could happen?

What would you tell a friend who was thinking like this?

What's the worst case scenario?

What's the best case scenario?

If that did happen, how would you cope?
What could you do?



If you were feeling calmer/happier, what would you be thinking?



Sometimes it can be helpful to spend time on a significant thought or worry if they are really stuck on it. Help them to think about what evidence they have for the thought (what makes them think it's true/going to happen) and what evidence they have against it.

Encourage them to think like a judge and consider the facts. When they weigh up the evidence, what is their verdict? Is the thought true or false?

You can then help them come up with a more balanced thought that takes all the evidence into account.

Help them feel their best

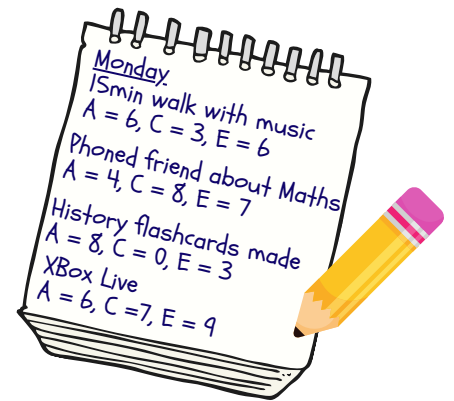


Research shows us there are three key qualities of activities that can help boost and maintain our mood: they give us a sense of **achievement**, allow us to feel **connected** to others, and/or are **enjoyable**.

We refer to these as **ACE**.

During exam and revision periods, studying tends to take over which can completely throw our ACE off balance. While revision is of course the priority, we still need to make time for a range of activities that will help maintain our wellbeing. Taking a break to see some friends, get some exercise or just properly unwind ensures we are in the best physical, mental and emotional state to get the most out of our work.

Introduce your child to this concept and think with them about their current balance of activities. What have they done recently that gave them a sense of achievement, connection and enjoyment? What do they need more of in their week and what activities could help them with this?



Are there ways they could bring more ACE to their revision? e.g. use of art/visuals, making quizzes, studying with friends, revision games, rewards for completing certain tasks.

It is a good idea to plan and schedule in these activities so they are not dropped during periods of higher stress. Many young people find it helpful to schedule these into their revision timetable.

Healthy Balance of Activities: ACE

Connection is simply about feeling connected and close to others

Achievement is simply doing something successfully

There are some activities we may not necessarily enjoy, but getting them done still gives us a sense of achievement i.e. revision and exams!

There are many ways to achieve - it's not limited to school work or winning a match



There are many ways to connect - hanging out with a friend isn't the only way to feel connected

We can connect through our hobbies by doing them with others e.g. baking, listening to music or playing games online, watching movie at the same time

We can achieve through our hobbies e.g. learning a new song, trying a new recipe



During exam periods, we need to shift our expectations: going for a walk, eating healthily or taking a shower may actually be massive achievements!



You can feel connected to others through a sense of community; faith, nature, shared interests (like supporting a football team) are good examples of this

Sometimes we need reminders to do things we enjoy just for the sake of it! This might involve particular activities, places or people



During exam periods, we need to shift our expectations: conversation with a family member, texting a friend, organising a group revision session or study quiz can all be ways of connecting

Enjoyment is simply liking what you are doing or having some degree of fun



During exam periods, we need to shift our expectations: soothing and restful activities may be our main source of enjoyment, it's just important we are taking breaks!

What we find enjoyable is different for each person depending on our interests and what is important to us



Pause to appreciate the little things: being able to notice and identify even small moments of enjoyment is important e.g. a funny joke or a particularly cosy jumper

Healthy Study Habit Strategies

The Pomodoro Technique



- 1 Identify a task
- 2 Set 25 min timer
- 3 Work on task with no distractions
- 4 Take a 5 min break when timer ends
- 5 Repeat this process up to 3 times
- 6 Take a longer break e.g. 30 mins

 Pomodoro 1 25mins Rest Pomodoro 2 25mins Rest Pomodoro 3 25mins Rest Pomodoro 4 25mins **BREAK!**

Eat The Frog



- 1 Identify the Frog (hardest/most important task)
- 2 Your Frog might be the one you find the trickiest, will take the longest or just the one you want to do the least.
- 3 Eat the Frog! Do it before any other tasks

Not 'dreading' the Frog all day - frees your mind for other things

Can't give yourself the chance to put it off

Accomplishment will trigger an endorphin boost early in the day

The rest of your tasks will seem easier in comparison

Takes advantage of your most efficient hours: energy not drained by secondary tasks



Brian Tracy named this idea after a quote by author Mark Twain:
"If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first."

Study Tips for Procrastinators



BREAK IT DOWN

Feeling overwhelmed and unsure of where to start is a common barrier to getting stuck into revision. Break down what you need to do and identify just 1 or 2 realistic and achievable goals - no matter how small! Make a pact with yourself to do them no matter what.



PUT IT IN PERSPECTIVE

It's easy to get caught up thinking about the future when working towards a long term goal but if we are struggling to focus, this can lead to worries 'snowballing'. We start thinking about consequences of failing which adds to the pressure and leaves us feeling paralysed. If you catch yourself doing this, pull back and try to re-focus on the task at hand. Just take it one day at a time!



PRACTISE SELF-KINDNESS

It's OK that you don't want to work all the time! Getting annoyed at ourselves for procrastinating is not helpful and just feeds into The Study Trap. It doesn't always feel like it but *everyone* struggles with concentration and motivation. Think: are you more motivated by kindness and understanding or by criticism and put-downs?



REWARD YOURSELF

For the tasks you really want to avoid and put off as long as possible, decide to reward yourself for getting it done to provide some motivation e.g. favourite chocolate bar, an evening off from revision.





BRAIN BREAKS

Our brains are wired to look for novelty: switching gear for even just a few mins gives us a chance to re-set and tackle the next thing more effectively. Get out of your revision space and do something that engages your brain in a different way e.g. pat your head and rub your stomach.



BALANCE OF ACTIVITIES

Across each week, we need to take on activities that give us a balance of Achievement, Connection and Enjoyment (ACE) to maintain our wellbeing and protect us from burn out. We can also try to add connection and enjoyment to our revision activities e.g. study with friends, use our creative skills to produce revision materials.



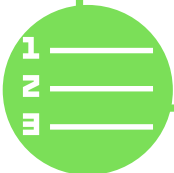
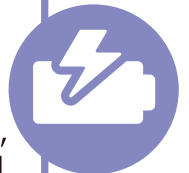
PRIORITISE

When you want to do everything perfectly, it can seem like all of your tasks are equally important, leading to you feeling overwhelmed and trying to do everything at once (which isn't very effective!) Pick your top three tasks and rank them in order of most to least important. Ignore all other study tasks until these have been completed.



PRACTISE SELF CARE

In the depths of revision season, basic self-care (8-10 hours sleep, showering, exercise, healthy eating, socialising) can drop off as we feel we "don't have time" or it is not as important. This is just short term thinking! Looking after yourself is essential to ensure you feel your best so you can do your best!



Further Resources

Get Revising (study resources, past paper questions, quizzes, make your own timetable, flashcards, etc): <https://getrevising.co.uk/>

Childline (Assessment Stress & Pressure): <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/assessment-stress/>

The Mix (Study & Exam Tips): <https://www.themix.org.uk/work-and-study/study-and-exam-tips/exams-and-the-pressure-to-do-well-23966.html>


NHS (Tips to Help Your Teen Beat Exam Stress): <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/help-your-child-beat-exam-stress/>

University of Queensland (Top tips for helping your teen with an exam period): <https://future-students.uq.edu.au/stories/helping-your-teen-during-exam-period>

Family Lives (Exam stress tips and advice video):
<https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/school-learning/exam-stress>



THE SIGNPOST
Text support for 11-18 year olds
07480 635 025



If your child has questions about managing academic stress or other wellbeing topics, they can text **The Signpost** to chat with one of our practitioners. We provide a friendly listening ear as well as offering information and advice.

