

Coping with exam stress

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Coping with exam stress is this week's theme for my guest blog for London Mums.

Exams and tests can cause anxiety and stress for families; even younger children sitting SATs tests can suffer from nerves and worry about them. There are many small ways you can help reduce this stress.



Here are my top four tips to help you and your child deal with the stress of tests and exams:

1. Organisation

Help create a work area at home with all the resources and stationery they need close at hand. Having a place to work where your child will be comfortable and not interrupted will help them feel calm and in control of their work.

Encourage an early start to revision. Help your child set up a file for each subject, sub-divided for each topic, and advise them to file information, notes and handouts daily, long before revision needs to begin.

Get hold of past exam papers for them to practise and keep a note of key dates and deadlines to ensure you support them before the 'panic stage'.

Offer to help with interactive learning such as spider maps, or question and answer sessions, but accept their choice if they'd rather study alone. However, ensure they know that it's essential to do something more than simply re-reading information to allow the brain to learn, make connections and remember.

2. Parental support

Parental involvement can make an enormous difference to a child's exam success, but parents don't need to be an expert in any subject to make a real difference through supporting their child. Show an interest, encourage them, try to motivate them by establishing a feel-good factor about the learning.

All learning is hard and requires sacrifice and deferred gratification, but also brings benefits. For 11+ exams it helps children to visualise the end goal of going to a particular school; for older children, going to university and getting a good job.

3. Revision stress

Although a little bit of stress can be motivating, if it gets out of hand it can stop your child from performing at their best. To get those feelings out of their system, encourage them to talk freely to you, friends or school tutors.

If your child is feeling frustrated or under stress during revision, they should take a proper break: go for a walk, play some sport or take an hour to watch some television. In any case, they should take a short five minute break in every hour of revision to switch off and just breathe! They also need to wind down before bed and not revise under the duvet, as their bed should be a place of rest and sanctuary.

4. Exam day nerves

On the day of an exam, keep conversation light at breakfast and don't talk about the exams unless your child brings up the subject.

Remind your child that there is no need to panic, but if they do feel panicky during an exam, they need to sit back for a moment and breathe slowly and deeply in and out through the nose, to calm themselves.

Before any exam, remind them that you love them and value them, whatever the outcome. After the exam, however they feel it went, remember to remind them of the same!

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