



The purpose of this document is to guide parents through the unenviable build up to the exams and to provide some advice on how best to create a suitable learning environment at home with top tips on revision and planning to minimise student stress.

How parents can support their children's mental health and wellbeing through the summer exams

The pressure to achieve academic success can overshadow a child's physical and emotional well-being. Sitting exams may naturally cause stress, on top of other worries that children may be struggling with. Having reasonable expectations as parents will have a better impact on your child and promote a healthy balance. Understanding and preparing for the signs of stress can prevent your child from getting overwhelmed. At this time in their lives, teenagers are also experiencing physical, hormonal and neurological changes in the brain which can be unsettling for them. It is important that they know you are there to support and encourage them and help them to perform to the best of their own ability.

Here's a guide which may help you both get through this challenging time, particularly if you are unsure as to what to expect. (Tassomai support tools – www.tassomai.com).

Practical Tips to Support Your Child:

DO

- Start the conversation! Ask them questions about how they're feeling. If they're not comfortable sharing, try opening up about any struggles you've faced in the past. Vulnerability is contagious
- Act early! If you think they are struggling, don't sweep it under the rug. Even if you're not sure of the best way to help, it's always better to address any underlying issues or unhappiness as soon as it arises
- Educate yourself on mental health and the best ways to support your child if they are struggling. www.tassomai.com has great resources for parents and carers who want to feel a bit more informed
- Work with your child to try and set up a sustainable routine around GCSE preparation, even if it's initially 15 minutes each day. The confidence-building power of daily routine is transformative and can prevent performance stress before it starts.



DON'T

- Stop them from seeing friends during revision time, it's good to break up the work with healthy social situations and everyone needs some downtime
- Try to take everything on yourself - it's really important to remind yourself that you are not a professional and there may come a time when your child needs more than just your personal support. This is very hard, especially for parents, as our natural instinct is always to try and 'rescue' someone we care about from situations that are hurting them, but we can't do everything ourselves, nor are we qualified to
- Allow stress to become sickness. Intervene before your child has a chance to get overwhelmed - it's all too easy for everyday stress over GCSEs to tip into something more serious, so don't let a fixable situation get worse than it needs to
- Let your child mistake a single test score for a final assessment of their potential. Instead encourage them to focus on how their work is developing, what they want to improve next, and on the positive incremental changes over time.

Spotting The Signs Of Exam Stress: (taken from the Tassomai GCSE Parent Guide)

Students preparing for exams often display very similar characteristics and it is good for parents to be aware of a few classic archetypes of exam-stressed children and recognise the signs.

The Ostrich

The ostrich is that student who, at the mere mention of their exams - or their revision - buries their head in the sand. They could be quite obvious in this behaviour - "I don't want to talk about it" - or it might be subtler, finding an excuse to get out of the room and avoid the topic. Waste no time in confronting this behaviour and making a plan together, because the very act of avoidance means that the revision work will pile up and the stress will increase.





The Porcupine



Similar to the ostrich in many respects, but rather than avoid the conversation, the porcupine might become rather spikey and start shaking their quills. The reasons are quite similar, and the approach, likewise requires calm, careful conversation and a structured plan to work together to remove the fear of the exams.

The Lion

A tendency of higher-achievers - the Lion is that child who seems to have it all under control, but spending an inordinate amount of time lying around. If they're behaving as though the exams present no problems - to the point perhaps of arrogance or laziness - then it's time for a conversation. Are they hiding any anxiety and feeling like they can't ask for help, or don't know how to?



The Bower Bird



The Bower Bird (who spends large parts of its life decorating its nest) lends its name nicely to the type of student who keeps themselves terribly busy focusing on superficial tasks like colouring in notes or organising files and revision plans. Talk to them, constructively, about their aims for each revision session, and check in with them regularly to see how much they have achieved.



The Meerkat



You might think you've been fortunate if your child is the Meerkat: super busy, extremely diligent, revising late and requesting extra practice papers from the teacher. But this behaviour may indicate a lack of confidence and a tendency to worry. Talk to your child to make sure they're keeping things in perspective and limit the revision schedule in order to allow time for R&R.

Practical Revision Tips For Your Child: (taken from the Tassomai GCSE Student Guide)

- Encourage them to take a “little and often” approach to studying. Studies have shown that students learn a lot more when they work for concentrated, short bursts every day, rather than cramming on one day for hours at a time.
- Read up on different learning strategies. Implementing proven techniques such as “interleaving” can help your child to optimise their time spent revising. Interleaving focuses on improving knowledge retention, through switching between topics and returning to them at later dates. By revisiting topics more often, students will become more regularly exposed to concepts and will be able to build upon their knowledge of them more easily.
- Help your child to research online resources. As online learning has become more common, various websites have offered up online learning tools to help students make the most of their time at a computer or on their phone. Be sure to download past papers, mark schemes and subject specifications from exam board websites so that everything stays relevant to assessments.
- Introduce your child to different revision techniques. The “Pomodoro” technique helps to break up stretches of work into manageable chunks, by studying to a 25 minute timer with a 5 minute break in between each round. This can help your child to focus and to do more worthwhile revision.
- Encourage your child to keep healthy revision habits. Different students react to revision stress in different ways, so it's important to keep an eye on how your child is feeling. If your child is overworking themselves, it may be time to step in and get them to take an hour or two off - this time to rest can be just as important as the revision itself.



Preparing For Exams:

Sometimes the hardest part of revising is simply knowing where to start!

- Encourage your child to access after-school intervention and revision sessions
- Help them create a revision timetable and stick to it
- Make sure they have all the essential books and revision guides
- Go through their notes and help them create a good filing system
- Suggest the use of revision cards – using flash cards can help the brain categorise information
- Place post it notes in every day spaces (the fridge or bathroom mirror) for a quick refresh
- Treat your child to some new stationary to make revising more interesting

Exam Revision Techniques:

Encourage your children to try different techniques to make learning more accessible and fun. By trying a range of methods it should add variety to their learning and create memorable links with the topics.

- Matching key topic words with diagrams (dual coding) to help memory retrieval
- Using a Mnemonic to structure an exam answer e.g. ...
- Learning in a new location – different room in the house
- Matching colours with topics – coloured card, coloured pens = red and yellow are most impactful
- Splitting topics into its parts and creating a mind map, placing it where it can be seen regularly
- Setting a timer for 45 minutes and working to the full time and taking a break
- Getting your child to pretend to teach you (the protégé effect) will increase their learning effectiveness and you can see what they have missed by referring to their revision cards

Exam Question Paper Techniques:

If you are familiar with the structure of any question paper you can help your children break down the unenviable task of completing it.

- Identify what is meant by the command word in the question and test them on how best to answer it e.g. 'evaluate' – write about the facts and provide your own conclusion. Other commands could be 'compare', 'suggest', 'predict', 'justify'.



- Make sure they don't miss any questions out – encourage a best guess, especially if it is multiple choice
- Work out how much time they should spend on each question, according to the marks per question
- Suggest they check their answers at the end to make full use of the time. Students are not permitted to leave before the timetabled end.

Using Past Papers Effectively:

Practising past papers (with your children) can be hugely beneficial and will identify your child's knowledge gaps. Checking answers immediately after the completion of each question provides instant feedback, crucial to learning. Good exam technique and knowing how to answer a question can change a grade. Understanding command words such as 'explain' or 'describe' can limit misunderstanding and put students at ease.

The mock exams give your child the chance to revise, apply and practice what they know under timed conditions. This experience is designed to build confidence, familiarity and sets expectations. Students can then close those knowledge gaps before the actual exams.

What To Do When:

One Month Before

- Start quizzing! The best way to know how confident they are in a topic is to quiz them on it
- Identify weaker topics that could do with additional work and prioritise them over topics they already feel confident in
- Get your child to explain topics to you - teaching others and switching up looking at a textbook is a great way to embed knowledge

One Week Before

- Focusing on instant feedback – get your child to answer one question at a time, checking their results against the mark scheme so they learn exactly what the examiners are looking for
- Using them for stamina training – suggest your child to practice sitting down and completing an entire paper under timed conditions. This will help get your child in the headspace for their assessments, but be careful that they don't burn out from doing too many



- Working on exam technique – ask them to structure a model essay answer or explain how they would work out a complicated question. Planning how they can best use their time in an exam is really important.

One Day Before

- Stop them from attempting to cram too much the night before, it's better to go over a few topics just to jog their memory and then relax
- Have a restful evening with a focus on getting them a good night's sleep and some comfort food – being well fuelled is the best way to face an exam

Above All, Offer Support And Encouragement To Your Child:

The most important support you can give is to create a healthy balance between work and self-care. Where possible:

- Encourage your child to join your family meal times. Provide them with healthy, nutritious snacks in the fridge.
- Encourage them to relax and unwind and to build in free periods to socialise.
- A brisk walk can help clear the mind between revision sessions.
- Tell them that you will support them irrespective of the results outcome.
- Encourage them to do well for their own sake and not to meet your expectations.
- Help them keep some perspective on the whole exam series, and not to dwell on the exams that have not gone well.

Keeping them hydrated, eating well, sleeping well, sticking to a routine, taking regular exercise, making time for short revision breaks, encouraging contact with their friends, having regular check-ins, minimising unhelpful distractions, and sticking to the exam plan is the key to success.

Who Do I Contact With An Exam Related Query?

The Exams Officer at St Augustine's School is Mrs Zoe Hill. She is responsible for administering all public examination arrangements and for the oversight of students during exams, under the direct responsibility from the Head of School (Miss Aishling Robinson).