

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP CHILDREN IN EXAM TIME:

How do exams affect parents?

The emotional stress that the parents go through can lead to one or more of the following symptoms:

- Tiredness
- Insomnia
- Cough and cold
- Irritability towards each other
- Aches and pains all over the body
- Occasional fever
- Memory lapses

How can parental stress affect children?

If a parent is getting unduly emotionally stressed due to the child's exam, the child is likely to experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Lack of desire to study
- Periods of memory lapses
- Inability to concentrate for long periods
- Ailments like headache, bodyache, mild fever, cough or cold

How can parents avoid this?

Parents can provide emotional support to their child by keeping a few simple things in mind:

- ~ Be affectionate but don't make the child uncomfortable with over-attention. A hug in private just works fine.
- ~ Spend some light moments with your child. It could be sitting at the dinner table and sharing some jokes with the family.
- ~ Forget about an exam as soon as your child has appeared for it, ruminating over it is not going to help you or your child. Inculcate the same in your child.
- ~ Spend some time together with your partner.
- ~ Do one thing that gives you joy or happiness every day. Encourage the same in your child.

~ Do not set down rules for your child; let the child follow his or her routine while studying. Nevertheless, you can always assist your child in coming up with a routine. For example, if your child says he or she is likely to sit up late, ask whether he or she would need anything. Do not stay up unless your child wants you to.

~ Focus on the child's and your own nutrition. Remember not to cook food (like *halwas*, *biryani*, etc) that will make your child lethargic. If you do prepare these foods, see that your child eats in moderation.

~ Provide guidance when it comes to your child's social interactions during the examination. For example, if you feel your child is wasting a lot of time talking to a particular friend; gently steer your child towards his/her pending lessons.

~ Be a good listener.

~ Help your child with positive thoughts.

~ Keep the atmosphere at home stable and congenial.

~ Encourage discipline in your child. Guide him or her in maintaining a time table.

~ If you or your child is experiencing any of the above mentioned symptoms, remember to meet a counselor or psychiatrist immediately.

~ Remember to reinforce your child's confidence if he or she is going to face or has faced a tough paper.

~ One of the most important facts to reinforce to your child is that the exam is not the end to everything. There are many things the child has to look forward to.

What can parents and carers do?

One of the best things parents or carers can do if their child is experiencing exam stress is to try to be as supportive and tolerant as possible. Reassure them that there are more important things in life and that this is only part of the story. Let your child know you will help them no matter what and, although naturally you want them to do well, you will not think any less of them if these particular exams don't work out.

Below, we've put together a list of study, practical and relaxation ideas that young people have told us helped them to manage exam stress. We've also included some tips on how to help your child deal with stress on exam day.

Study and learning habits

Helping your child to establish effective study and learning habits can help to reduce stress:

- Is there an uncluttered table where they can work? Help them to find somewhere which is likely to be undisturbed.
- Encourage your child to find out exactly what the test involves - are there past test papers they can look at to help them understand what to expect?
- Encourage your child to ask for help or ask their teacher for clarity if they are unsure of something or if they feel confused
- Help them to make 'mind maps' to collect ideas and summarize thoughts - use bright colours to help remember important links
- Help them to plan their study schedule early on so that they have sufficient time to study. It can be helpful to develop a clear, realistic plan of what they want to cover in each study session. Can they break it down into small chunks?
- Remind your child to take a short rest and move around in between each part of their study
- Offer help sometimes. It can be useful having someone to listen or practice with

Practical ideas to help your child cope with exam stress

- Encourage your child to stick to a routine of going to bed at a reasonable time, eating regularly and making time to have fun and exercise
- Help them to cut back on coffee or any other stimulants they may be using, as these can increase agitation. Encourage them to drink lots of water instead
- Encourage them to take time out when they eat, rather than carrying on with study
- Encourage them to eat fresh fruit, veggies, cereals, grains, nuts and protein - they are all good for the brain and blood sugar levels.
- Encourage them to eat when they get hungry. This keeps blood sugar and hydration levels steady
- Avoid junk food if possible because it will bring a sudden sugar high and then fall away quickly leaving a person feeling tired
- Try not to nag as they may be feeling a lot of pressure already. It helps to stay calm and offer support - perhaps offer a cup of tea occasionally or record their favorite TV program to watch later

Relaxation ideas to help your child cope with exam stress

- Always encourage your child to relax before they go to bed after concentrating for long periods of time. Activities such as reading a book or chatting to a friend may help them unwind and sleep better

- Encourage them to go out for a walk, run or to do some other exercise that they enjoy
- Relaxation techniques can be very effective if you see your child's anxiety rising. For example, put on some gentle music, get them to lie down, close their eyes and breathe deeply while visualizing a calming scene such as a deserted beach
- Encourage your child to visualize success - this can really help with self-confidence

Ideas for exam day

Talk about these ideas before exam day so as not to add to anxiety levels.

Suggest to your child that they:

- Organize and pack everything that they need to take with them into the exam, the night before
- Keep away from people who may agitate them before the test or may say unhelpful, anxiety-provoking comments
- Take time to slow their breathing and relax when they first sit down
- Read through the paper, underlining key words and instructions. Work out how long they have for each question or section
- Watch out for the wording of the questions - make sure that they understand and address what the question is really asking
- Answer the questions they find easiest first, then as they relax more move onto the other ones (by then their mind has relaxed and they are likely to find the work easier)
- Re-read answers if possible and make any changes that are necessary - cross out notes, correct spelling, check workings