

# Exam Stress and Anxiety

Parent / Carer Session



# Session Agreement



## Session Aims:

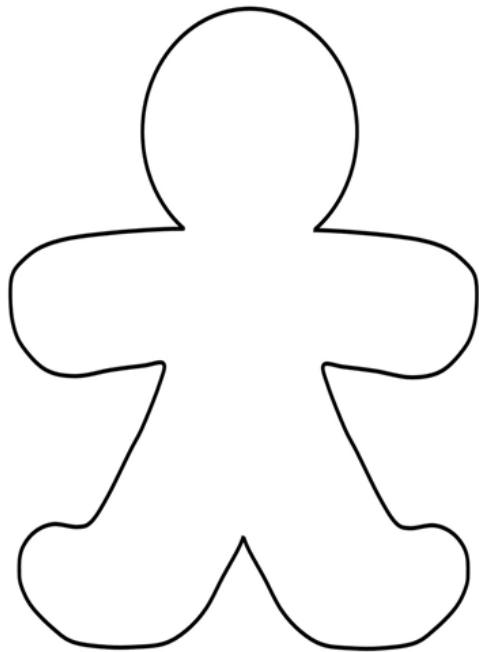
- ✓ To develop an understanding of what exam stress and anxiety are
- ✓ To know how to spot the signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety
- ✓ To explore ways to support your child if they are struggling

# What is Exam Stress / Anxiety?

**Exam stress describes the emotional, physiological, and behavioural responses caused by an imminent test or exam.**

Mentally Healthy Schools, 2022

# How Stress Affects the Mind & Body



Label the head and body diagram with:

- What a person might think or say when stressed (head)
- The physical symptoms a person might experience (body)

# Physical Signs and Symptoms

- Difficulty getting to sleep or difficulty waking up in the morning
- Constant tiredness
- Forgetfulness
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Poor appetite
- Loss of interest in activities
- Increased anxiety and irritability
- Increased heart rate
- Migraines/headaches
- Blurred vision and/or dizziness
- Comfort eating
- Drinking too many caffeinated/energy drinks
- Exacerbated existing health conditions/depleted immune system (feeling 'run down')

# How to Spot the Signs

The following may indicate exam stress / anxiety:

- Complaints of physical health problems (e.g. stomach aches, headaches etc.).
- Not sleeping or eating properly.
- Mood changes, such as being tearful, angry or withdrawn.
- Being reluctant to attend school or talk about tests and exams.
- Spending too much time on their work or alternatively avoiding schoolwork.
- Being overly self-critical of themselves and of any mistakes they make.
- Becoming obsessive in the way they work – unwilling or unable to break off.

# Exam Stress and Anxiety: A Summary

- Some degree of stress and anxiety around exam periods is normal.
- In fact, it can be positive, helping children and young people to learn coping skills and develop resilience.
- Temporary stress can be tolerated if children and young people have developed resilience and are cushioned by strong adult relationships.
- Toxic stress – the prolonged activation of stress responses without strong adult relationships – is what we want to avoid.





# Common Causes of Exam Stress

- Poor preparation
- Worry about failure
- Pressure to perform
- Uncertainty about the exam questions
- Unfamiliar surroundings and people overseeing the exams
- Concern about what others will say if they don't do well
- Lack of confidence about revision
- Feeling that teachers and other adults don't understand stress



# Top Tips for Parents in Supporting your Child during Stressful Periods



# Talk about Stress & Worry

- Remind your child that it's normal to feel anxious. Nervousness is a natural reaction, especially during assessments, coursework deadlines and exams. The key is to put these nerves to positive use.
- If anxiety is getting in the way rather than helping, encourage your child to practise the activities they'll be doing on the day of the exam. This will help it feel less scary.
- For example, this may involve doing practice papers under exam conditions or seeing the exam hall beforehand. School staff should be able to help with this.
- Help your child face their fears and see these activities through, rather than avoiding them.
- Encourage them to think about what they know and the time they've already put into studying to help them feel more confident.

# Provide Reassurance

- Remind your child of past successes and how they overcame challenging periods previously.
- Encourage positive self-talk and a 'can-do' mindset.
- Encourage them to talk (to you, another supportive adult or their peers).
- Reinforce that you are and will be proud of them no matter what happens.



# Encourage a Revision Schedule

- With your child, create a colour-coded revision schedule.
- Short 40 minute sessions followed by a 10 – 20 minute break can often work better.
- Plan small rewards in each break (e.g. cup of hot chocolate, biscuit, quick walk outside etc).
- Stick to the schedule and include one full day off per week.
- Discourage revision in the bedroom (or revising at least an hour before bed) as this can make it difficult to switch off.



# Support Varied Revision Strategies

- The best way to revise or to learn is by teaching someone else.
- Encourage your child to teach you, a sibling or to work in study groups to revise.
- Encourage varied means of revision; creating raps, singing silly songs or rhymes, mnemonics, flashcards, sticky notes on the wall, recording voice notes, mind maps, practice questions etc.



# Ensuring a Healthy Diet

- A balanced diet is vital for your child's health, and can help them feel well during exam periods.
- Some parents find high-fat, high-sugar and high-caffeine foods and drinks, such as energy drinks, cola, sweets, chocolate, burgers and chips, make their children hyperactive, irritable and moody.
- Where possible, involve your child in shopping for food, cooking (if they enjoy this) and encourage them to choose some healthy snacks.



# Supporting Good Sleep

- Good sleep improves thinking and concentration.
- Most teenagers need 8 to 10 hours' sleep a night.
- A good bedtime routine is really important during exams.
- Allow an hour or so for your child to wind down between studying, watching TV or using a computer and going to bed, to help them get a good night's sleep.
- Cramming all night before an exam is usually a bad idea. Sleep will benefit your child far more than a few hours of panicky last-minute study.





# Encourage Exercise

- Exercise can help boost energy levels, clear the mind and relieve stress. It does not matter what it is – walking, cycling, swimming, football and dancing are all effective. Cardio is great for relieving stress.
- Activities that involve other people can be particularly helpful.



# Be Flexible

- Be flexible around exam time. When your child is revising all day, do not worry about household jobs left undone or untidy bedrooms.
- Staying calm yourself can help. Remember, exams do not last forever.



# Don't Add Pressure

- Childline says many children who contact them feel that most pressure at exam time comes from their family.
- Listen to your child, give them support and avoid criticism.
- Before they go in for a test or exam, be reassuring and positive. Let them know that failing is not the end of the world. If things do not go well they may be able to take the exam again.
- After each exam, encourage your child to talk it through with you. Discuss the parts that went well rather than focusing on the questions they found difficult. Then move on and focus on the next test, rather than dwelling on things that cannot be changed.



# Make Time for Treats

- With your child, think about rewards for doing revision and getting through each exam.
- Effort rather than achievement should be the focus.
- Rewards do not need to be big or expensive. They can include simple things like making their favourite meal or watching a film together.
- When the exams are over, help your child celebrate by organising an end-of-exams treat.



# Useful Videos for Young People

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7W2yMxWaJk> –  
How to ACE an Exam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73TCYeEUAOM> –  
How to Cope with Exams and Revision Stress

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AgswlajRw> – BBC  
Bitesize Beating Exam Stress

# Useful Websites

- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/14-ways-to-beat-exam-stress/>
- <https://www.kooth.com/>
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/a-z-guide/exam-time/>
- <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/preparing-exams/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/resources-for-managing-assessment-related-anxiety/resources-for-managing-test-related-anxiety>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/help-your-child-beat-exam-stress/>
- <https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/school-learning/exam-stress>



# Useful Apps



**For age 10-18**



**Mindshift –  
teens and  
young adults**



# Final Questions

Any final thoughts or  
questions?



# Feedback Forms

Please complete the feedback form on  
your table.



Many thanks for your time 😊