

## **Helping your child cope with exam stress**

**Exams can be a major source of stress for many young people so helping your child deal with any worries will be really important. Here, senior consultant psychiatrist Dr Ramya Mohan offers some tips on dealing with exam stress and on supporting learning of pupils about to take exams.**

### **Identify exam stress early**

Look out for warning signs that your child or teenager is stressed or suffering from anxiety.

Some common signs of stress include:

- sleep disturbances
- erratic or poor eating (skipped meals, picking at the food on their plate, etc)
- low mood
- low confidence
- frustration or anger
- queasy tummies, headaches and flaring up of skin conditions such as eczema.

### **Set realistic goals and expectations**

It's important to understand your child's strengths and interests and focus on those, whilst acknowledging their weaknesses.

Stories about other children with similar weaknesses (and how the children dealt with them, or how responsible adults helped them work through it) can help children find solutions to their own difficulties in a gentler way.

Reinforce that failure is a normal part of learning – and that people learn from their mistakes.

### **Help make learning fun**

Depending on your child's age, make learning an exciting activity. Use toys and tools to aid in their education and revision. Flash cards and online study aids can help.

### **Working environment**

When your child or teenager is studying, creating a consistent home environment will be crucial.

Keep mealtimes regular and set up a revision corner that is comfortable and inviting to work in, with as few distractions as possible. Everything they need should be close at hand so they don't have to spend time searching for things. This includes things like paper for the printer, pens, Post-It notes or electronic devices such as tablets and laptops.

### **Preparation**

Here are some tips on planning ahead for each exam:

- Have an exam rota in a visible place to everyone in the family, i.e. on the fridge or next to the front door. This ensures you all know what exam is when.
- Create to-do lists.
- Ensure your child or teenager has practical and simple considerations in place so they don't have to worry on the day. These will include things like researching bus or train times or letting them know you will drive them to each exam so they don't need to worry they might be late.

### **Communicate**

Show an interest in your child's studies. Ask them how their revision is going and then, when the time comes, how their exams went. Having simple conversations at the end of the day and giving positive feedback on their efforts will go a long way.

### **Take a break**

It's easy to get caught up in making sure your child stays focused, but breaks are important, too. Encourage relaxation and make sure they take part in other activities to unwind, like playing football, painting, meeting friends etc.

Music and art are ideal activities to aid in stress relief, reducing anxiety and stress management.

If your child is listening to music, relaxing notes and slower tempos are especially useful to help the brain calm down and reflect better.