



The Ultimate Exam Survival Guide



for Parents

Tips and wrinkles to help get through exams

FOR PARENTS

To make the most of the opportunities life offers, your teenager will be sitting important exams in the next few months. Exams are a necessary evil, and helping your teenager through them will take up all of your time and energy! You will want them to do the very best they can, and achieve all of their potential, and this can be made possible if a collaborative approach is taken that includes you, your teenager and their school.

Most information on how to succeed in exams, is aimed at supporting the students. This booklet however is different: it is aimed at you, the parent, and how you can best help and support your child during the run-up to GCSEs. The advice contained in this booklet is not one size fits all, but if you can identify the key issues for your child it might make life easier to bear, and help you to be prepared for whatever comes up. Being prepared is a key strategy to feeling in control, and this document will show you how.

The exams are never just about the child; at times, it will seem as if the whole family are along for the ride and suffering the anxiety and stress associated with the exam period. You cannot hope to be fully knowledgeable or an expert in every subject your teenager is studying, nor are you a teacher, and you don't have to be. You just need to know how best to spend the time you have in order to support and motivate your child.



Be there or be square

Leave teaching to the experts, but get your child into school every single day, on time, so that they don't miss that one vital piece of information that might make it all come together.

Encourage them to make the best use of lessons and study time, staying awake, taking notes and participating. According to research by the DfES, pupils who attend with no absences, are 1.5 times more likely to achieve 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent and Government statistics show that there is a link between attendance, punctuality and results at GCSE.

“I don't have any homework”

This is most unlikely, but check their planner anyway! Even, in the event that it is an accurate reflection of the situation, you can suggest that they do some revision instead. Evidence suggests that those students who start early and chip away at revision, do not find the exams such an ordeal. This 'little and often' approach strengthens their memory and steers young people away from the anxiety of leaving their revision until the last minute.

Know what is coming next

Most mock exams are held for one week in December or January, giving your child a chance to learn how to work under exam conditions. Predicted grades are based on mock exam results and the teacher's knowledge of your child's work. If your child's grades are disappointing, encourage them to talk to their teachers and start working on the subjects where they need to improve. Mocks are a trial run, students need to learn from them and adapt their strategies if needed. The main GCSE and A Level exam period is usually from mid-May to the end of June, although some language orals and practical examinations can happen earlier. Make sure you know when every exam is scheduled. Take a copy of the timetable given to your child and put it into your electronic calendar. Cross check dates and make sure that family events and holidays don't clash. It can be a costly mistake to have to cancel an expensive holiday! The exams are usually a once only event that must take priority over anything else that comes up. If they miss an exam, your child will usually have to wait a whole year to re-sit it. Knowing when each exam is due will enable you to make sure your teenager is fully equipped, eats well, gets enough sleep and relaxation, and when you can 'let up' on their household responsibilities.



How to negotiate a revision agreement

The aim here is to try to balance study and leisure time and to agree the rules for homework or revision. You will feel fear! "If they don't work hard, they'll fail, and end up stacking supermarket shelves for the rest of their life!"

Discussion that involves your teenagers identifying what they hope for in the future and giving them a message that you know they will achieve their hopes because of their positive attitude, hard work and motivation will help to create a positive mental attitude. Encouraging self-direction and aspiration is likely to be more effective than removal of privileges or grounding.

Start early and offer to help them make a realistic timetable that can be reviewed and amended as necessary. Encourage your teenager to put the timetable up in easy view and to mark off achievements. Plan rewards when study is adhered to and goes well, a special meal, cinema tickets, a sleepover etc. 'All work and no play.....'



Create a dedicated and peaceful space for revision to take place, often this is not best served by their bedroom, which can cease to be their place to relax and sleep, and instead becomes a reminder of what work needs to be done, causing stress and insomnia.

Allow your child to decide what methods work best for their learning, sometimes working in pairs with a friend testing each other, working in small groups or listening to quiet background music can help them concentrate better, even if it is hard to imagine!

Decide what works well

Educate yourself about current popular revision methods your teenager might have been taught i.e. mind maps, brief notes, pictures, spider diagrams, recordings. Studies show that learning through the senses helps information to stick. Just reading things through doesn't always work!

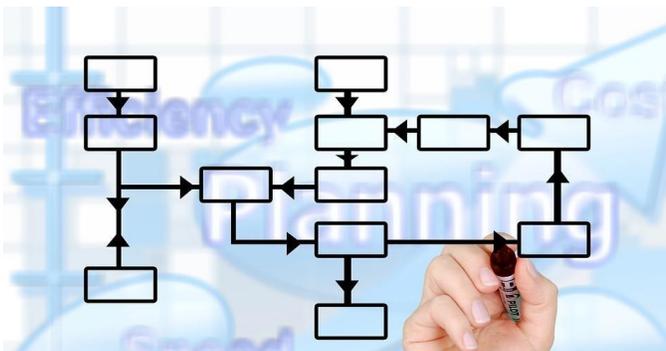
Find out when revision sessions are being offered by the school and ask teachers or tutors for help on any subjects they don't understand. You could consider arranging external help, but make sure that any tutors are keeping to your child's curriculum and exam board subject requirements This might be an option if your child is struggling, but do talk to their subject teacher first, as tutors tend to be costly and of limited value if your teenager fails to engage. Some schools and organisations run internal exam 'boot camps' on particular subjects for free so do check what is available first.

Nurture their body and mind

Make sure they eat properly and drink plenty of water. The brain works better when the body is fed and watered, and dehydration can cause headaches and loss of ability to focus! If your child will let you, accompany them on a walk, or bike ride or some other physical activity over the revision period, but do also encourage plenty of sleep. Whilst computer games and television can provide relaxation and mind ease, they can also prove a huge distraction and may overstimulate the brain near bedtime. So, agree in advance what is reasonable especially the night before an exam.



The school knows their stuff!



Some schools use their past experience to run advice sessions for parents. Do take these opportunities up, and go along to any parent workshops on offer. Ask questions and find out how you can best help your child at home. Take time to understand the main areas of learning in subjects and encourage your child to share their revision notes.

You can check how they are doing by letting them explain something to you. If you understand the explanation, it is likely that they will be able to produce a good answer in the exam.

Parents into action on exam days

Here is where your support is vital! Making sure your teenager gets up on time and dresses in school uniform if required, giving them a great breakfast, getting to the exam centre in good time before the exam is due to start and making sure they have all the things they need, is where you will come into your own!

Create a brief checklist: clear see-through water bottle and pencil case, black pens and sharpened pencils, a rubber and a ruler, calculator and protractor- the list is not exhaustive!

Remind them to put their mobile phone or smart watch or any other electronic device into their lockers before the exam or remind them to switch them off and hand them in. The penalties can be severe for breach of exam rules! Check that they know their candidate or seat numbers.



And then.... breathe and relax!

Try to be positive and reassuring to build your teenager's confidence. If they agree, go over some of the relaxation techniques and practice them together- you are as likely to be anxious as they are! Then, stand back, let them do their best, sit it out meanwhile and wait.

And know that.....it all happens again tomorrow!

When they come home

If the exam went well, relax and celebrate, talk about what they were especially pleased about. If it didn't go well, remind them that it is now over and done with and if it was the last paper of the course, they won't have to worry about it again. If they have a second or third paper in that subject, they still have an opportunity and time to recover the situation. Post mortems are rarely helpful, the message is that it is over and done with, move on and concentrate on the future.



Some Useful Websites and Contacts

(Information correct at time of going to press)

General support for teenagers

- www.projecteducation.co.uk/gcse offers links to GCSE chatforums.
- www.bbc.co.uk
- www.childline.org.uk/explore/Pages/Explore.aspx
- www.youthaccess.org.uk/

General parent support

- www.parentlineplus.org.uk confidential helpline for parents on 0808 8002222
- www.projecteducation.co.uk

Exam boards

- www.aqa.org.uk the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)
- qualifications.pearsons.com Edexcel-Pearson
- www.ocr.org.uk Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- www.wjec.co.uk the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC)

Coursework and revision

(Please read notes on the use of essay banks in 'revision').

- www.coursework.info
- www.sparknotes.com
- www.gcseguide.co.uk – Use the 'bookshop' option to see what revision guides are available in each subject area.
- www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize
- www.gcse.com

Careers

- <https://direct.gov.uk>. The governments' official careers information site. Visit the Education and Learning pages and choose 'Which way now? Years 10-11' followed by 'Your Choices in Year 9' to find out more about your options.
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/studentlife/careersandchoices/>
- Visit <http://nextstep.direct.gov.uk> and select Planning your career then Job profiles for free information on hundreds of different careers.
- www.Careersbox.co.uk - Careers films/videos – real people in real jobs
- www.icould.com - Career advice, HE choices
- www.opendoorsmedia.co.uk - Regional training prospectus – everything you need to know about college, apprenticeships, careers, training schemes and jobs in local area
- www.apprenticeships.org.uk - National Apprenticeship Service
- www.futuremorph.org - STEM careers
- www.targetjobs.co.uk - Careers info – construction, accountancy, banking, law, engineering, environment, media . . . etc

