

Exam support guide for Parents





Supporting your child through exams

It's that time of year again: exam season. How can it have come around again already? It was only five minutes since they were studying for their GCSEs!!!

Undoubtedly this a worrying time for young adults but also for parents as it can be very difficult to watch your child under stress and experiencing exam burnout, but there are ways you can support them and make **their** lives and **yours** much better.

Managing expectations surrounding exams is crucial to your child's wellbeing both physically and mentally. Get the message across early that they do **not** have to be perfect to experience success. The focus should be on doing the best that they can. Remind them that whilst exams are important there **IS** life after them and there are **ALWAYS** other options to consider which will enable them to fulfil their dreams.

One of the most important things you can do early on is let your child know that it is **perfectly normal** for exams to create feelings of anxiety and stress. They may feel like they are the only ones experiencing these feelings so reassure them that they are not alone. Let them know that you are there to support them.

Although this is a stressful time for young adults and their families remember that some level of anxiety can be seen as an opportunity to instil resilience in your child. You could see this as a chance for your child to learn effective skills and strategies which they will be able to use in the future when they face further challenges in life.

There are many ways you can help your child get through exams so do not give up hope and remember that staff are here to support you and your child every step of the way.



Strategies to support your child.

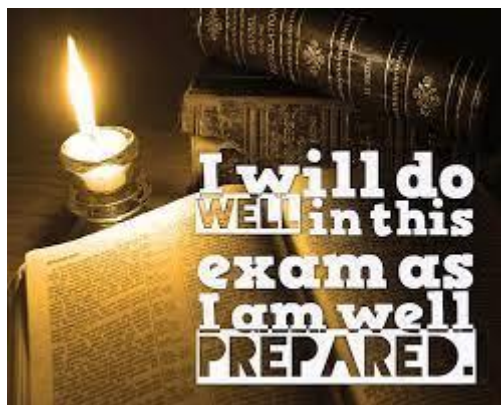
The importance of talking

- Create a safe environment which allows them to express their feelings openly and honestly. It may be useful to talk about the following:
 - (i) How do they feel about the exams? Are there positives? Are they seeing them as an opportunity to showcase all the hard work they have put in whilst at college? What are their concerns?
 - (ii) How do they want to approach their revision? Remember **they** are the ones that are going to be completing the exam papers, so they need to have control and choice of their approach to the exams.
 - (iii) What are their main revision strategies? You might want to work together to look at different methods which they prefer (see later section '**Revision Techniques and Strategies**')
 - (iv) Is there a quiet space at home they can use which is comfortable and has no distractions? Research suggests that it is not conducive to sleep in the same room they revise in as revision materials can cause anxiety. If this is not possible, try and pack revision materials away so they cannot see them when they are trying to sleep.

- (v) What time of day do they prefer to revise?
 - (vi) Do they prefer to study alone, or do they sometimes want to work with friends? Studying with friends gives the opportunity to offload their concerns in a safe space and have fun whilst still learning.
 - (vii) Are there any apps they want to download, or software needed?
 - (viii) Are there any resources they need (books, paper, pens etc)?
 - (ix) What role would they like you to play in their revision (if at all)? Can you test them? Would they like to teach you something? Will they be attending extra revision sessions at college (they may need your help reminding them of when they are)
- Be there to listen when they want to talk. A lot of the time they are not necessarily looking for advice, they just want to offload their concerns.
 - Give reassurance and encouragement. If you can see that they are trying, make sure you tell them. Adopting this approach may mean that they will be more likely to share their feelings and let you know how you can help them.
 - Try to avoid lecturing and nagging. **Never** be critical even if they are not working as hard as you think they should be. It will not help to improve the situation and it will probably make your life at home more challenging if there is conflict. Make sure they know that you believe in them and reinforce how proud you are of their efforts.
 - Go to any support meetings offered by college. If you have any questions, contact subject tutors, progress tutors and learning mentors (if applicable). You will be sent a copy of your child's exam dates and times so make a note of them.
 - Help your child to keep on top of work, but also factor in fun times, rest, and relaxation. It is important to take regular rest breaks as this will help them to refresh and come back to revision feeling more relaxed. Get them outside, if possible, when they are on a break.
 - Follow the study planner that will have been devised together with your child and their learning mentor as it will be meeting their individual needs. If your child does not work with a learning mentor, contact college and examples can be sent to you

then you can work with your child to create one. You may want to display this, so your child has a visual representation of their exam timetable.

- Make sure they are eating, drinking, getting enough sleep. Offer healthy snacks as much as possible and make sure they stay hydrated.
- Sleep is so important to physical and mental wellbeing. Lack of sleep can lead to an increase in stress and anxiety which will ultimately impact on performance in the exams. You may want to try and establish a wind down pattern before bed, so they are able to relax and sleep well. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, mindfulness and breathing exercises could be useful here. There are lots on You Tube which you could explore together. Let staff know who work with your child and they can use these too.
- Your child may like the use of affirmations to boost their confidence which they can have on their phones as reminders.



- Remind them of the support at college (Progress Tutor, tutors, learning mentors, college counsellor). There are also enrichment opportunities that specifically focus on preparing for exams, mindfulness techniques etc.
- Plan a treat together for when the exams are finished.



Revision Techniques and Strategies

Remember that young adults learn in lots of different ways, and they may favour a combination of study strategies to aid their learning and understanding.

The diagram below identifies some of the ways teenagers learn:

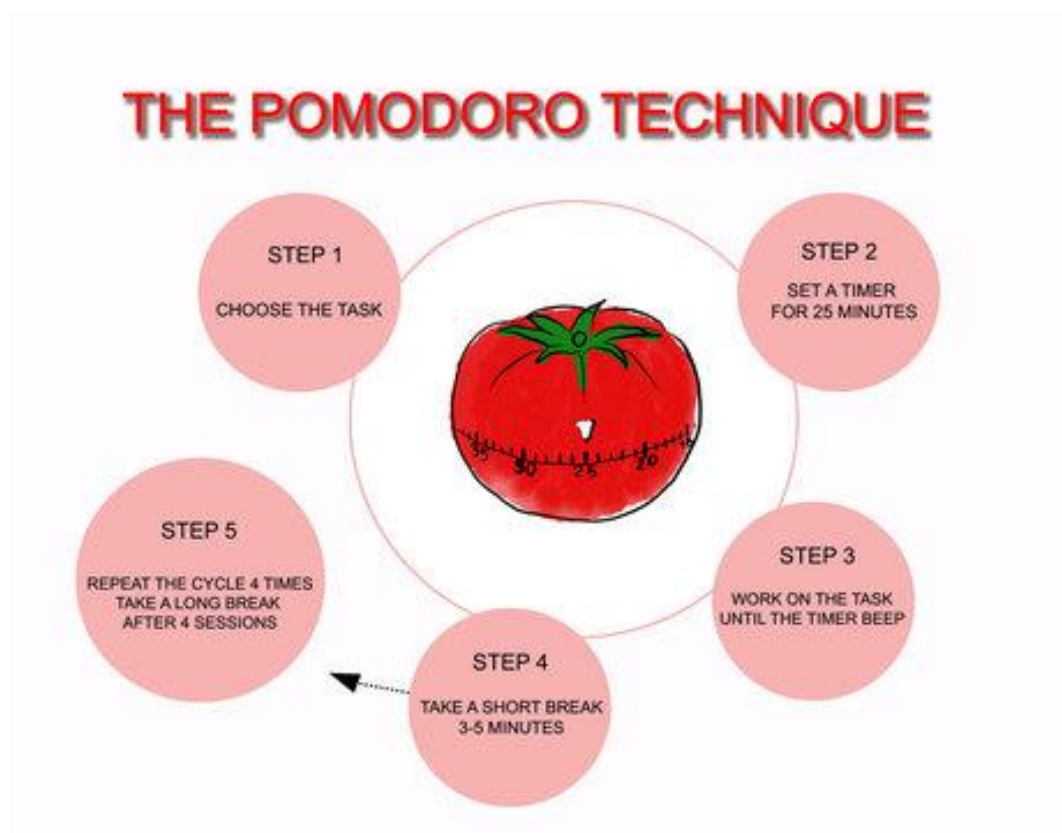


It is advisable that they use a range of strategies to keep revision interesting and engaging. The most effective revision is about **QUALITY** not **QUANTITY**. It is best to work in short periods of time and complete focussed, effective work than sit for hours and achieve little. An example of working in set time frames is outlined by the Pomodoro Technique below.

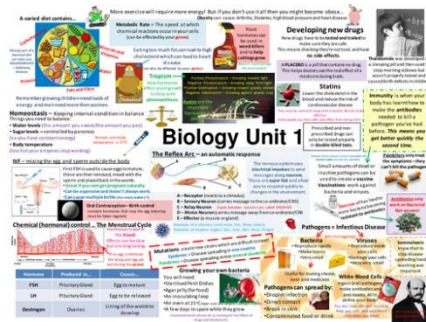
The Pomodoro Technique

This technique was developed in the late 1980s by Francesco Cirillo who found that whilst studying at university he was struggling to maintain focus on assignment work as he was feeling overwhelmed. To reduce these feelings, he set himself a challenge of committing to just ten minutes of focused study time and then take a five-minute break, after which, he returned to his studies again. It is called the Pomodoro technique as he used a kitchen timer in the shape of a tomato (which is pomodoro in Italian).

This approach involves breaking down or 'chunking' work to be completed in 25-minute slots with a 5-minute break after every set. Research has shown that the Pomodoro Technique can aid concentration and help students to complete tasks in a focused manner. It has been shown to be particularly useful for students on the autistic spectrum. When working with students on the autistic spectrum it is vital that the tasks set are specific and clear so that students can follow them easily and understand clearly what work they must complete in the time limit.



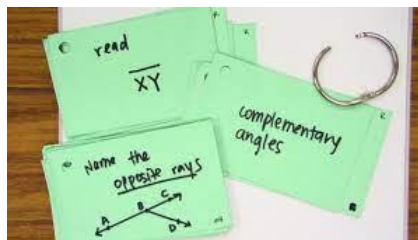
Some examples of revision techniques can be seen below:



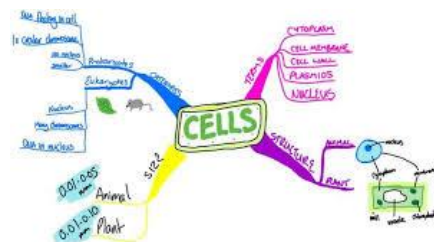
Posters



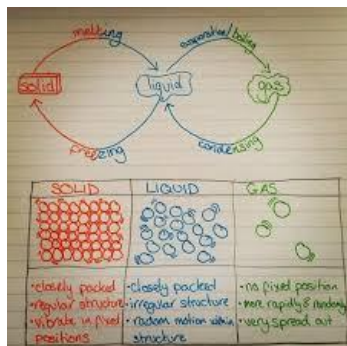
Post-it-notes



Revision cards (colour coded)



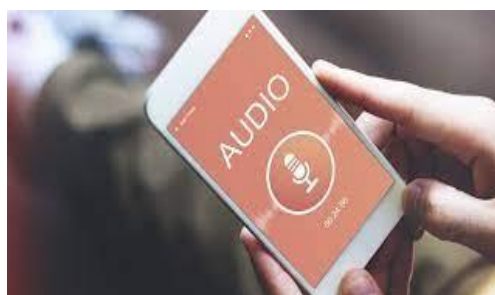
Mind Maps



Drawing diagrams / graphs



Videos online



Voice notes



Saying things out loud to yourself



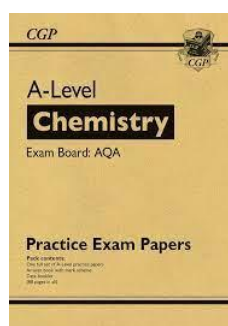
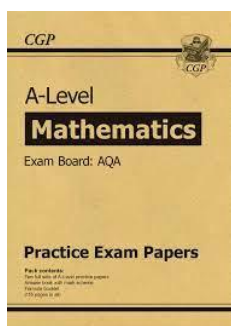
Explain what you are learning to family. Get them to test you



Online quizzes. Write your own then test yourself



Revision group with friends



Past paper questions (using notes at first but then under exam conditions). Use the mark scheme to help you grade the paper or ask your teacher to mark it

The night before and the day of the exam

- Remind them how hard they have worked during their time at college and how proud you are of them, regardless of results. There **IS** life after exams and there are **ALWAYS** options if exams do not go according to plan.
- Try to avoid last minute revision. Encourage them to review the work they have done and then relax and take a break, so they are prepared for the next day.
- Make sure their bag is ready the night before which has all the relevant equipment needed including their college ID. You might want to place it at the front door.
- Think about what they are going to wear. Talk about how they need to be in comfortable clothing as exams can be long (particularly if they have additional time). Are they affected by temperature? It may be warm outside, but it can be cold in the Sports Hall or certain classrooms. Advise them to take a hoodie or warmer clothing they can put on.
- How are they getting to college on the day? If they have extra time and it is an afternoon exam, how will they be getting home? These could be major concerns for them so make sure you discuss it and ease their worries.
- Encourage them to relax. They may like listening to music, podcasts etc. If they have an intense interest encourage them to leave it at home but emphasise that they will be able to take part in this interest as soon as the exam is over
- If possible, make sure they have something to eat before the exams, or give them snacks to take with them. Make sure they have bottled water (with no label)
- Do not bombard them with questions after the exam. Give them time and space. They will tell you what it was like in their own time. On the other hand, the exam may be the only thing they want to talk about when they see you. Let them – it will help to ground them and release their feelings.
- Do not dwell on the exam once it is finished. Congratulate them for completing it and tell them how proud you are then move forward to the next one. Be there to support them and let them know you love them and are proud of them irrespective of results.
- Prepare their favourite meal for them / have their favourite snacks.
- Let them relax and engage in hobbies they enjoy as they will probably be tired.

Signs that your child may be struggling and how to get support.

At home

- A change in their 'normal' pattern of behaviour (can be a subtle or major change), e.g., they may change from being outgoing, to uncharacteristically quiet.
- May stay in their room more than usual.
- Changes in appetite (eating less or eating more, particularly junk food)
- Not sleeping
- Difficulty getting them out of bed in the morning.
- Not socialising with friends (either online or meeting up with them)
- Going out more with friends and avoiding college work
- Using social media more
- Difficulty getting them to focus on college work.
- Mood swings
- Constantly talking about exams or not wanting to talk about them.
- Self-injury

In college

- Non-attendance
- Late to class
- Distracted in class, withdrawn, quiet.
- Not handing in homework, coursework, assignments
- Not completing work (in class, during study periods at home)
- Grades have declined.
- Avoiding support sessions
- Dismissive attitude 'I don't care about exams' which could be a sign of anxiety.
- Tearful – very worried about exams and always wants to talk about them.

If you are worried about your child:

- Talk to them – if they will share their concerns with you that's great. If not, will they talk to a friend, a teacher, a learning mentor, their Progress Tutor, college counsellor, the chaplain etc. Be positive with them – not too much pressure.
- Contact college to raise your concerns with their Progress Tutor / tutors / learning mentor(s)
- Look at the support available online (see later section 'Help for Exam Stress')

Remember, staff are here to support you in ANY way we can. Good luck and keep in touch so that we can help you and your family.

Help for Exam Stress (see website Health and Wellbeing for links)

The following list is taken from GOV.UK and is aimed at students and parents to help manage worries about exam and revision stress.

Advice for children and young people

[Childline](#) is a service provided by the NSPCC offering confidential advice to children and young people. See [Childline's tips for beating exam stress](#).

[YoungMinds](#) is a charity working to improve emotional well-being and mental health amongst children and young people. See [YoungMinds' advice for young people](#).

[Student Minds](#) is a mental health charity for students. See Student Minds' [resources for dealing with exam stress](#).

[Mind](#) is a charity providing mental health support for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See [Mind's 14 ways to beat exam stress](#).

[BBC Bitesize](#) offers resources to help students with homework, revision and learning. See Bitesize's advice on [how to deal with exam stress](#).

[GoConqr](#) is a personal learning environment to aid learning and revision. See GoConqr's tips on [how to deal with exam stress](#).

[The Student Room](#) is an education website offering peer support for students. See The Student Room's [advice on dealing with exam stress](#).

Advice for parents

[YoungMinds](#) is a charity working to improve emotional well-being and mental health amongst children and young people. See [YoungMinds' advice for parents](#).

[NHS](#): See the advice from the NHS: [Help your child beat exam stress](#).

[Family Lives](#) is a charity helping parents to deal with the changes that are a constant part of family life. See Family Lives' advice for [supporting your teenager through their exams](#).

[Relate](#) is a charity offering relationship support. See Relate's advice for [coping with exam stress as a family](#).

[TheSchoolRun.com](#) is a website offering resources to help learning at primary school. See their advice on [helping your primary school child with exam stress](#).

[Teenagers Translated](#) is a website offering information to help parents understand their children during their teenage years. See their advice on [managing exam stress](#).