



Understanding and Managing Exam Stress

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Uncertainty

Exams are a time of uncertainty




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Aims of the Workshop

- What is exam stress/anxiety
- How it can look like
- What happens in the brain & body
- What can we do to help




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The Stress Continuum



Eustress




Distress



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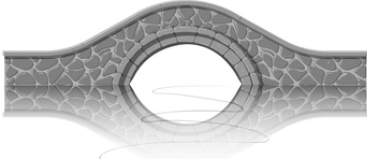
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Revision and Exams

Revision can create a bridge between home and school

Home



School





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What is Anxiety (Exam Stress)

“Anxiety is the tense emotional state that occurs when you can’t predict the outcome of a situation or guarantee that it will be the desired one.”
Chansky, 2004





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Revision and Exams


Revision and Exams can create a chasm between

- Home and school
- Parent and young person





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What are the Purposes of Revision

- Check understanding
- Practice and embed
- Processing
- Extend learning



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What are the Benefits of Revision

- To embed the learning
- To embed the learning into long term memory
- Increased academic attainment
- Prepare them for later school years and beyond
- Prepare them for the work place
- To manage time
- To further develop problem solving skills
- To learn to prioritise
- To learn to be organised

"Learning takes place at that point where we struggle to match what we know with what seems to be new and different."

Delaney, M. (2008) Teaching the Unteachable, London, Worth Publishing

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What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is
“an intense agitation filled with tension and dread.”

- It is an everyday occurrence
- Most people experience it
- It can be helpful
- It can be unhelpful

www.understandingspecialeducation.com

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Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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Transitioning and adjusting to Secondary School and puberty

Exam pressure, the unknown, transition to 3rd level education and/or workplace

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Thinking Brain

Worry Brain

Mild Worry
↓
Helpful

Catastrophic Worry
↓
Not Helpful

Parts of the Human Brain

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Anxiety/Exam Stress has Many Different Masks

- Visibly stressed
- Worry silently
- Withdraw
- Self harm
- Present as angry and non-compliant
- Panic attacks
- Run away

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Anxious Thinking

- Distorted
- Exaggerated
- Unreliable
- Catastrophic


Often focus on the negative not the positive



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The Anxiety Formula


Chansky, 2004

Overestimation of threat + Underestimation of ability to cope = **Anxious Response**

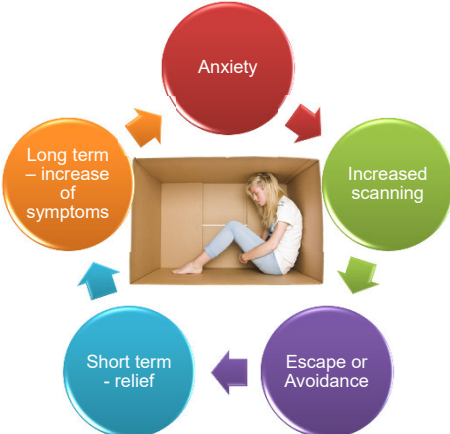


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Cycle of Anxiety



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Anxious Thinking

All or Nothing Thinking

- If I am not perfect I have failed
- Either I do it right or not at all

Over-generalising

- Everything is always rubbish
- I have never passed any tests

Jumping to Conclusions

- Mind reading
- Fortune telling

Magnification & Minimisation

- Blowing things out of proportion
- Shrinking things

Shoulds/Musts/Ought's

- I should do better – guilty
- They should help me more

Labelling

- I am not clever
- I am useless
- I am a failure

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Body Responses to Anxiety

Headache

Dizziness or light headiness

Difficulty swallowing

Shortness of breath

Tight chest

Tight shoulders

Palpitation

Need to urinate or defecate

Scanning the environment

Butterflies

Sweating

Shortness of breath

Shakiness

Feel sick

Neck pain

Dry mouth

Close down

Muscle pain

Wobbly legs

Stomach ache

Blurred vision

tiredness

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You are scared because you had the thought, not because it is true

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Fear and Anxiety changes the way we think

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Neither comprehension nor learning can take place in an atmosphere of anxiety

Rose Kennedy

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Composite of 20 student brains taking the same test

After sitting quietly After 20 minute walk

Research/Scan compliments of Dr. Chuck Hillman University of Illinois

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What Can We Do To Help


- Notice your feelings
- Be confident
 - Planting it in the brain
 - You are scared because you had the thought, not because it is true
 - Relabelling
- Acknowledging their feelings
- Notice their body changes
- Sleep well
- Eat well
- Drink water
- Exercise

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What Can We Do To Help


- Find out what you are worried about
- Anxiety always passes
- Set a routine
- Sensory input – stroke an animal
- Little steps
- Know that it takes time
- Play, draw, create
- Our thinking brain
- Empathise with them
- Give them time
- There are always other routes/options


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Issues That Our Young People Face With Revision


- Organisation
- Prioritising tasks
- Understanding the tasks
- Focus & concentration
- Time management
- Quality work





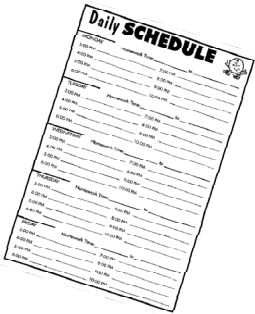
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Daily Revision Routine


- Communication
- Discuss how much time is needed
- Develop a daily schedule
- Check if working






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How to Support Your Young Person With Their Revision


- Routine
- Work Space
- Organisation
- Being comfortable
- Distraction
- Mood (theirs and ours)
- Motivation





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Setting up a Work Space


- Work with your young person to chose a study area
- Think about the logistics of that space
- Needs to be well lit, comfortable, free of distractions and quiet
- Personalise the space
- Independent decision making
- Think about other ways of sitting






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Revision Survival Kit



- School books
- Pens (different colours)
- Pencils
- Pencil sharpener
- Rubbers
- Ruler
- Scientific calculator
- Homework folders
- Stapler and staples
- Compass
- Protractor
- Scissors
- Sticky tape
- Glue stick
- Hole punch



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Mood and Feelings




Ours Theirs




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Distractions




- Distractions take up the same mental resources needed for learning
- Manage distractions
- Manage phone
- 15 minutes then a 2/3 minute break then another 15 minutes
- Gradually extend the time
- Use Install Self-Control or Freedom



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Fear/Anxiety-based behaviours

Lying, Aggression, defiance, arguing, screaming




Fear/Anxiety-based feelings
Angry, hostile, Shameful, frustrated,
Envious, jealous, scared

Forbes, H. T. & Post, B.B.,
(2006) *Beyond consequences, Logic and Control* (a love-based approach to helping children with severe behaviours, volume 1), Orlando: BCI



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Communication Skills


Try to view it through the young person's eyes and remember their developmental age

- You need to
- I am wondering if
- I can see that
- I am guessing that
- It looks like
- I am really sorry you feel like that

If you can't say it in 10 words,
don't bother saying it.



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Encouraging/Expanding

Open Ended Questions (not too many)

Questions that can not be answered with yes or no


- What is that like for you?
- I am wondering what is going on for you when you say that?
- How did that make you feel....sad.....can you say some more about that?
- What do you think about this?
- What else might help?




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“Empathic statements go straight to the young person's heart and soul;



Questions go straight to the mind to be processed and evaluated”.




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Reflective Responding

Your 15 year old abruptly stops writing in their English book, frowns and shoves the book across the table.


Your initial thought/feeling:




Response:

It looks like it is not working out the way you wanted it too.

You are not happy with what you have done.



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Reflective Responding



Your 16 year old suddenly flops their head on to the table and says I am rubbish, I can't do it.

Your initial thought/feeling:

Response:


It looks like you are finding it really difficult and it is making you think that you can't do it.

I wonder what makes you think you can't do it.





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Motivate your young people to do Their Best Work

- Praise your young person's efforts. (Say what you see)
- Telling your young person specifically what you liked about their work.
- Giving a hug or pat on the shoulder as it can increase the impact of your motivation.
- Sit with them when they are doing their homework.



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Reflective Responding



Your 16 year old refuses to do their revision.

Your initial thought/feeling:

Response:


Find a time to sit with them. Try to understand why they are refusing. (Remember it is fuelled by fear)

I can see revision is presenting a difficulty, I wonder what we can do to help.





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Motivate Your Young People to do Their Best Work

- Choose an incentive that your young person will appreciate.
- Be consistent with the incentives. Once or twice will not produce results.
- Phase out incentives.
- Remember incentives are your choice not your young person's




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Motivate your young people to do their best work


- Beat the Clock - Set a timer for assignments. Every time your young person "completes the time" offer him/her an incentive.
- Bag of incentives
- Chunking – Break down the revision into smaller tasks. Give an incentive for each section that gets done appropriately.
- Smile when it comes to revision and exams





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Exam Day


Exam Day

- Rest well
- Try to get them to eat breakfast
- Have the correct equipment
- Get there on time
- Encourage them to think through doing the exam positively



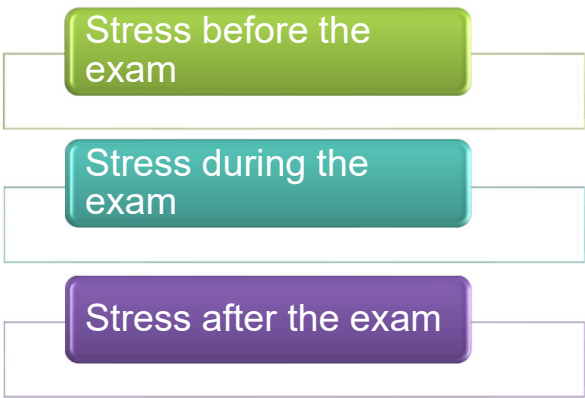
After the exam


- Nurture and calm
- Feed them
- Try not to grill them
- Breathe and don't panic



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Support

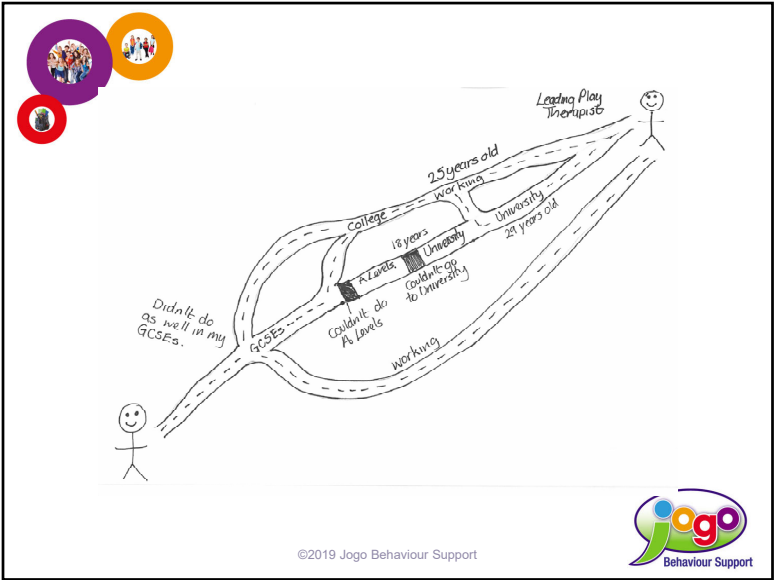
- Teachers
- Year office
- Achievement coaches
- Teaching assistants
- Other parents
- Internet





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*Here's to the kids who are different,
The kids with the mischievous streak,
For when they have grown, as history's shown,
It's their difference that makes them unique!*
Digby Wolfe

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Proverb

If you are patient in one moment of anger,
you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.

Chinese proverb



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