



Supporting your teenager's emotional wellbeing through GCSEs

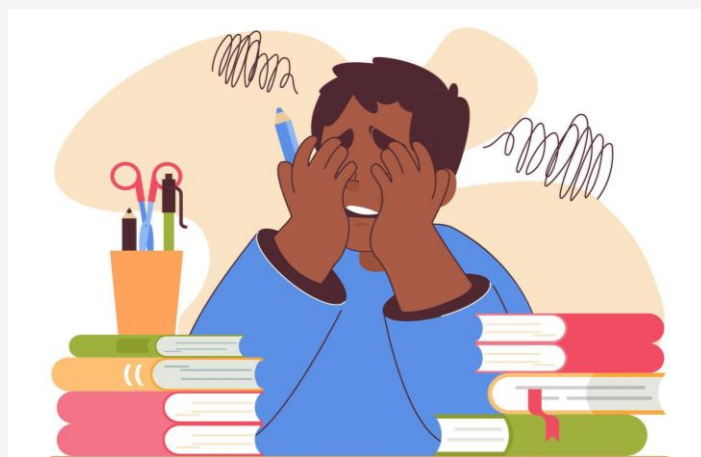
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KING EDWARD VI
SCHOOL LICHFIELD

GCSE Pressure

- “Exam season can be a pressure cooker - for teens and their parents,” says cognitive behavioural psychotherapist Nicola Ball. “It’s completely normal to feel stressed, but there are ways to ease the load and support each other through it. If you’re stressed, they’ll feel it. So, take care of your own wellbeing too.”
- GCSEs are an important milestone but they are not life-defining



How your child might be feeling

- Anxious about failing or worried about disappointing others
- Stressed about the amount of work they have to do
- Struggle with concentration, memory or sleep
- Become withdrawn, irritable or upset
- Compare themselves excessively to peers or siblings
- Seem unmotivated or disinterested in their studies.

Watch out for signs of stress - young people who are stressed may:

- worry a lot
- feel tense
- have headaches and stomach pains
- not sleep well
- be irritable
- lose interest in food or eat more than normal
- not enjoy activities they previously enjoyed
- be negative and have a low mood
- feel hopeless about the future



Stress and Anxiety

- Normalise the nerves - Let them know it's okay to feel anxious
- Stress is a sign they care, not that they're failing. Sometimes short-term bursts of stress can help motivate and improve performance, it's just when it overwhelms every moment and stretches over a period of time that it becomes a problem.
- Occasionally sharing your own experiences of being anxious and surviving will help your teen to understand that this is common.
- Talk to your children honestly about your stress and how you manage it. Talk through healthy coping skills you employ to help children develop some of their own.



Impact on the Family

Stressful exam periods can also be difficult for the wider family. By the final weeks of exam schedules, many parents talk about how everyone in the family felt exhausted or on edge.

- **Increased tension** - Small disagreements might escalate more easily when everyone is tired or anxious.
- **Changes in routine**- Exams or revision timetables may disrupt meal times, sleep schedules, or other activities.
- **Changes in mood**- When one person is stressed, others might absorb their mood, adding to feelings of stress.
- **Uneven attention**- Siblings may feel confused by the extra focus on the child taking the exams, and could start feeling left out or ignored.
- **Parental stress**- Worrying about how your child is coping, making sure they are engaging in self care, and managing family logistics.
- **Reduced downtime**- With revision dominating schedules, families may spend less time doing relaxing or fun activities together, making the home feel more tense or task-focused



What can you do to help?

Having a safe, calm space at home can make a big difference to how young people cope.

Food

- Cooking easy, nourishing meals and having plenty of snacks on hand.
- Meal prepping

Sleep

- Encouraging regular sleep and rest by reducing screen time late at night.

“We turned the Wi-Fi off at 9.30pm and my children deleted TikTok and Instagram for the exam period. What a difference!”

Environment

- Maintaining a tidy, comfortable study space.

Breaks

- Encouraging short walks, time outside, or just moments of fun or distraction away from revision.



What can you do to help?

- Talk openly as a family about how everyone is feeling, including siblings who are not taking exams.
- Acknowledge the effort everyone is making, not just the person taking the exams.
- Share out responsibilities, making sure that one person is not carrying everything. Seek additional help from wider family, support systems, or services where available and appropriate.
- Young people sitting exams may need a bit more flex over this period so they can concentrate on revision
- Keep routines where possible to keep a sense of stability.
- Be flexible during exams
- Staying calm yourself can help. Remember, exams do not last forever.
- Consider planning a treat or activity together to celebrate the end of the exam period, reinforcing that their efforts are appreciated regardless of the outcomes.



Additional Support

- If your child's worry seems excessive and persistent, it may be time to seek additional support and guidance

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Results Day

- Celebrate and praise
- Stay calm regardless of the outcome
- Discuss through next steps
- Discuss and support alternative pathways
- Avoid comparison



***“The main thing is to stay calm and don’t panic,” -
National Careers Service”***





What if I fail?
What if I don't get
as good as my
friends?

EXAMS STRESS

SUPPORTIVE TIPS FOR PARENTS

