

How can you help your child prepare for exams?

“Parental support is eight times more important in determining a child’s academic success than social class... The Campaign for Learning found that parental involvement in a child’s education can mean the difference between an A* and an ‘also-ran’ at GCSE.” (TES, October ’03)

There are many distractions for your child, with short term fun outweighing long term gain in terms of their priorities. In addition, children will differ in their levels of maturity, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, organisational skills and levels of motivation. This is where you come in! You are the expert on your own child and always have been his or her most important teacher. Your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child’s motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exam years.

Your role may include some or all of the following:

- **Attendance officer** – making sure your child goes to school and attends lessons.
- **Partner with school and child** – going to parents’ evenings, asking questions, finding out how you can help and asking questions your child can’t or won’t.
- **Provider of the tools for homework and revision** – a quiet space, pens, pencils, paper, highlighters etc.
- **Banker** – paying for revision equipment, revision guides, rewards and any relevant trips or excursions.
- **Study buddy** – showing interest in subjects and support during homework tasks. Ask your child to teach you things they have learnt.
- **Project manager** – agree the rules of revising and homework, balancing work with leisure time and adjusting plans as necessary. Put key dates in your diary – especially exam dates and times.
- **Information provider and interpreter** – find copies of past papers, search websites, find out facts about the subjects etc.
- **Motivator** – all pupils feel behind, demotivated and/or overwhelmed. Talk to your child about an appropriate balance between social and school demands; acknowledge their feelings, discuss key issues affecting them; list the priorities and help find solutions in a calm and kind way.

How can I emotionally prepare my child for exams?

Remember – exams can be stressful. It’s important that your child gets enough rest and is in a good state of mind. Help your child to prepare themselves emotionally, too. When we are afraid or anxious our survival responses (fight, flight or freeze) kick in, and remembering becomes more difficult. A little adrenaline is good, but concentrate on making your child feel calm, comfortable and confident.

- **Break exam/revision workload into manageable chunks** - work with your child to do this, model how to create a plan. Encourage your child to set aside some dedicated time for relaxing too.
- **Provide a calm space** - allocate a room that your child can use to relax during exam periods.
- **Tell your child where stress comes from** - talk about stress as a physical symptom; this normalises it, which can make it feel less overwhelming.
- **Be a good example** - talk openly about how you cope with your own stressful situations, so your child has a positive role model for managing their emotions and time.
- **Boost positivity** - balance your approach between boosting self-esteem and enabling your child to be practical about their preparations.
- **Take a practical and realistic approach** - they can only do their best in exams and they will only be able to do their best if they have prepared well.
- **Teach relaxation techniques** - guide students through slow, deep breathing. You can count out loud to guide the speed of their breathing. The in-breath should be shorter than the out-breath; try counting in for 3 and out for 5.