

Coping with Exam Stress



Signs of Exam Stress

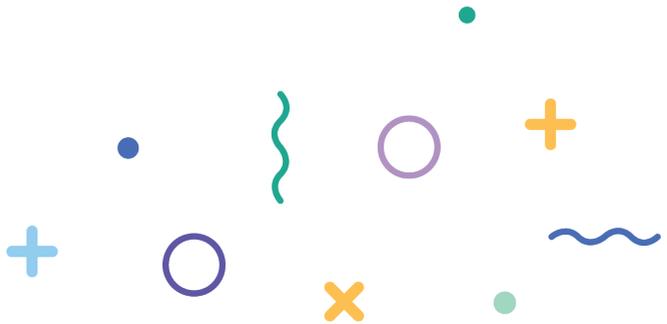
Working towards exams can feel overwhelming and create feelings of anxiousness for many students. It is important to remember that you are not alone in how you are feeling.

Here are some signs that you might be feeling stressed:

- struggling to get to sleep or not sleeping well during the night
- feeling more tired than usual
- losing interest in hobbies or activities you usually enjoy
- mood swings or feeling irritable
- changes in eating habits or loss of appetite
- headaches or migraines
- low confidence or poor self-esteem
- forgetfulness
- being unable to concentrate on everyday tasks
- getting upset easily or feeling more emotional than usual
- feeling hopeless about the future



These signs may also come as a result of more general mental health difficulties. If you are worried about yourself or someone else, speak to a trusted adult.



Managing Exam Stress

Stress and anxiousness can make you feel less like yourself, but there are things you can do to reduce these feelings.

Talk to Someone

Speak to a parent or carer, teacher or trusted adult about how you are feeling. You could also phone a helpline if you would prefer to speak to someone anonymously. They will be able to provide support and encouragement and offer a different perspective to help you find practical solutions to cope with how you are feeling.

Reach Out to Friends

If you have friends in the same year group as you, they will likely be experiencing many of the same thoughts and feelings. Talking to your friends can make you feel less alone and help ease feelings of anxiousness. Arranging revision sessions together can allow you to maintain some social interaction while also helping you to prepare for your exams.

Set Boundaries

Although talking to others in the same situation as you can sometimes be helpful, it can also be a source of more stress. Try to avoid surrounding yourself with people that constantly talk about the exams and how stressed they are, as this is likely to make you feel more overwhelmed.

Stick to a Routine

Having a regular routine can help to relieve feelings of stress and anxiousness. Try to make sure that you go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, and incorporate things that you enjoy within your daily routine. This can include watching TV, playing games or socialising with friends – it doesn't all have to be about revision!

Take Care of Yourself

Make sure you are eating properly – including healthy snacks to maintain energy levels while revising – and drink plenty of water. Exercise can help to clear your mind and relieve stress, so take some time to go for a walk, cycle or swim, or take part in a group activity such as football or netball.

Get Enough Sleep

Getting enough sleep is important in allowing your mind to rest and reset – most young people need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep a night. Don't stay up too late, and find calming activities to help you wind down before bed. Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and sugar too late in the day as, although you might feel more energised in the short-term, these can increase feelings of anxiousness and make it more difficult to get to sleep.



Revision Tips

Structuring your revision using the tips below can help you to feel less overwhelmed.

Make a Plan

It can feel overwhelming when you have several exams coming up and have no idea where to start with your revision. Creating a revision timetable can help to structure your revision and ensure that you are spending enough time on each subject. If you're not sure where to start, your subject teachers will be able to give you a list of topics to focus on.



Give Yourself Space

Give yourself a dedicated space for your revision, ideally away from your bed and other spaces you use for relaxing. Having all of your revision in one place will make it easier to find your notes and practice papers when you need them, and it means you can get away from it when you need to. When you take a break, physically move yourself away from your revision space to allow your mind to fully relax. If you prefer not to work at home or don't have the space, speak to a teacher about working at your school or college.

Set Realistic Targets

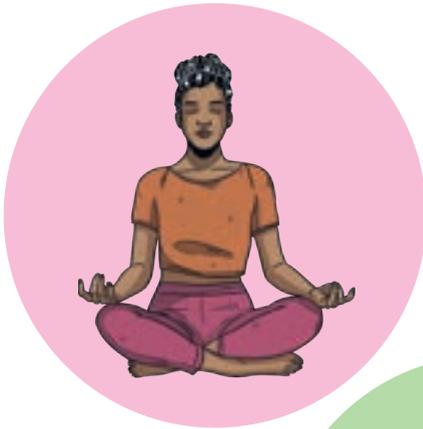
If you give yourself too many tasks to complete in a short space of time, you are more likely to feel like you've failed if you don't manage to get everything done. Try to focus on one topic at a time and break up your revision into short chunks of time. This way, you'll maintain your concentration and feel like you've achieved more at the end of the day, instead of worrying about what else you still need to do. It's also a good idea to prioritise the things you need to work on most, and be prepared to adapt and change these priorities as exams get closer.

Celebrate Success

Revision can feel never-ending, especially if you have lots of exams one after the other. Remember to reward yourself for small wins, such as finishing a chapter of your revision guide or completing a practice paper. It is important to recognise when you have done something well and use this to motivate yourself to carry on.

Take a Break

It might feel like you constantly need to be revising in the run-up to your exams, but it is important to take regular breaks and allow yourself time to do things that you enjoy. Even taking 5 minutes out to do something calming like listening to music or doing some mindful colouring can help to make you feel more relaxed.



Keeping Calm During Exams

Entering the exam hall can feel intimidating but there are things you can do to keep yourself calm and remain positive.

Breathe

Take a few deep breaths in and out to relax your mind and body. Try to block out any distractions and count slowly to ten. It is OK to take a moment to do this if you feel yourself starting to panic at any point during the exam.



Focus on the Paper

Make sure you read the instructions before you start the paper and think about any advice your teachers have given you about how to approach the paper. If you are struggling to get started, you could begin by answering the questions you feel the most confident with. This will give you a sense of achievement and motivate you to have a go at the rest of the questions.

Move On If You Get Stuck

If you are struggling to answer a particular question, don't waste time worrying about it. Move on to the next question and come back to it at the end. You might find that you've remembered something about that topic in the meantime.



Take Your Time

The exam isn't a race and you will still have to stay in the exam hall if you finish early, so use your time wisely and make sure you have done as much as you can. It can be helpful to give yourself a set amount of time per question to make sure you are not spending too long on one section, but try not to rush as you might end up making mistakes.

Dealing with Exam Results

Distract Yourself

You might find yourself worrying in the weeks leading up to getting your results, or not able to think about anything else once you've received them. In these situations, it can be useful to try to distract yourself and put this energy into something else, such as spending time with friends or focusing on a sport or hobby.

Keep Things in Perspective

Remember, exam results aren't everything. It is understandable to feel anxious about getting your results, or perhaps disappointed if they don't turn out how you wanted. However, try to remind yourself that exam results don't define who you are, and you have achieved plenty of other things in your life so far.

Don't Compare Yourself to Others

Everyone is different, and different people will excel in different areas of life. Just because your friend has got a higher grade than you in a subject, it doesn't make you any less successful. The most important thing is knowing you tried your best and did as well as you could.

Explore Next Steps

If you haven't done as well as you hoped, speak to a teacher about your options. It may be possible to send your paper off for a remark if you were close to the next grade boundary, or you might be able to retake the exam at a later date. Alternatively, you could talk through what the next chapter of your life might look like, taking into account your exam results as well as your skills and interests.

Celebrate Success

Focus on the subjects you have done well in and congratulate yourself on your achievements! Just preparing for and sitting your exams is a huge success, regardless of what your results are.

Further Support

For more help and advice around exam stress and results, you may wish to visit the following websites:

Childline www.childline.org.uk

YoungMinds www.youngminds.org.uk

Bitesize Support www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/support

