



DEALING WITH EXAM STRESS

Young people have many demands placed on them, not least when they enter the school years where exams are the main focus. Beginning in primary school and following them through their academic career, children can feel placed under enormous pressure to perform. With attainment tables and government demands, it can feel like children are not the focus of our education system; least of all their emotional and mental wellbeing.

Stress is a normal part of life and we shouldn't discount its usefulness as a motivator. Short term stress like a looming deadline or nerves about an upcoming performance can be really helpful in giving us the boost we need to get something done.



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Dealing With Exam Stress

It is when stress becomes an ongoing state, long term stress, constant feelings of anxiousness, feelings of dread and catastrophizing can be damaging to our health. When the body is in a state of stress, it lowers our immune system and increases our heart rate and blood pressure, it can also suppress the function of our digestive system. Long term, this can have consequences for our health.

When it comes to exams, we want to help children manage the emotions that they may encounter when it comes to those academic years. Some children may need more support than others.

Having an environment where your child feels they can come to you and talk about their concerns is one of the first steps; rather than dismissing their concerns, actually listening to what they are saying and how they are feeling can help you to know what way would be the best to help them.

It may be a particular topic or subject that concerns them, it may be how to revise or it may just be the whole idea of the exam and the environment of the exam room.

Top Tips For Managing Exam Stress

Listen

Let them talk it out. It may not make sense to us and we may not understand their concerns but let them say it out loud. Let them feel heard. We don't have to offer an immediate fix, but sometimes just being able to get it off their chest can make them feel better. After all, a problem shared is a problem halved. Even if you are unsure of how to help, offer your understanding and a listening ear. Be honest, tell them you don't have the answers there and then but that you'll help them work it out.

Emotions

We can help children to understand that their emotions are normal and are not permanent, they come and go and shift and change. We can help children to understand that how they are feeling right now isn't going to be forever. It is also useful to talk about the skills that exams measure and to help children to look at all of the other positive attributes they have and that an exam doesn't measure.

School

Perhaps it's a particular topic or subject your child is worried about. Talking to their teacher/tutor (possibly without your child knowing) could help you to put their worries into perspective or seek guidance on how best to support them. You may not be able to help them directly with the work, but flagging it with their teacher might help. You may want to look at extra tuition if you and your child feel that's something that is an option.

Top Tips For Managing Exam Stress

Revision

Help your child to make a revision schedule. Ensure it isn't too prescriptive and allows plenty of rest time. The earlier they do this, the better it will feel. Revision is great, but too much revision can be counter-productive. If it feels too much like a chore or isn't the right learning style, not much is going to stick. Seek guidance on different learning styles; reading a text and making notes isn't everyone's best way to learn. Some people are more visual, some more hands on and some need to hear it, and it's usually a combination of learning styles that is most effective.

Sleep

Ensure your child is making good choices around sleep. When they are younger, it's easier to set a schedule and routine for sleep, but as children get older, their sleep patterns change, their need for sleep changes in the amount they need and they want to feel more in charge of when they sleep. Children need more sleep when they are younger and less as they enter the teenage years; going from 12 hours a night to 9 hours as they get older. Modelling good practice is one way to do it. Look at your own sleep hygiene (see separate document for more information), are there changes you could make together?

Nutrition

It can be easy to reach for the quick burst of sugar and energy. Helping them to make good decisions around their diet in the choices they make and the food you provide for them is a great start. You may wish to seek guidance on nutrition and diet, making healthy changes for all the family.

Exercise

Ensure your child has some time away from revision, from the screen, computer games and phones. Getting out and about, getting some exercise and some fresh air is good for the body. It is also good for the mind. Being in nature can help us to feel better, increase our feel-good hormones and give us an energy boost. It's also good to spend some time doing something else and forgetting about the work for a bit.

Ultimately, exams and stress is a part of our life and culture, but that doesn't mean that we have to suffer in silence or that we can't find ways to help our children to manage it. By

Further Information

For further information and a thorough assessment, contact the Torus wellbeing book an appointment email: info@toruswellbeingclinic.co.uk



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