

ELSA Parents/Carers Guide

Supporting Exam Stress





Supporting exam stress

Recognising signs of stress

Young people cannot always identify the signs of stress so it is important that we look out for changes in their mood and behaviour so that we can support them in recognising this emotion.

Some signs to look out for are:

- Moodiness – it is always easy to presume they are just being moody teenagers but this could be a sign on stress
- Being irritable / less tolerance
- Loss of appetite
- Becoming quiet when they are usually chatty
- Lack of motivation
- Being negative about themselves and their future
- Not being able to sleep or seeming more tired than usual
- Lack of interest in activities that they usually found enjoyment from
- Disengaging from friends or family
- Complaining of physical ailments such as stomach pains or headaches

What you can do to help

- Stay positive – be aware of emotional transference. When our children are constantly being irritable or moody it is easy to lose patience with them however, it is important to stay calm and offer empathy to their situation.
- Use positive and encouraging language; when your child is saying “there’s no point I’m going to fail” you could use phrases such as “don’t stop now, you have worked really hard and you deserve to do well”.
- Remind them that this is not forever, this is just a temporary stress which means that the emotions are also temporary. Explain that this is a valuable life skill that they are learning as working through stressful times builds resilience.
- Normalise worries, explain to your child that it is perfectly normal to feel nervous before you sit an exam. You could give them examples of when you have felt like this before and offer them advice such as taking deep breaths before entering the room.
- Explain that when we are nervous we often have a lot of “what if?” questions floating in our heads. It is useful to explain that we cannot control what questions feature in exams but we can control how much we prepare for them. The more preparation you put in the more confident you will be when entering the exam.
- Ensure that they have access to a quiet and calm working environment without any distractions such as phones etc.

- Organisation is key to relieving stress, help your child to produce a visual timetable of the things that they need to revise along with achievable timings.
- Remember that we all learn in different ways so we need to manage our expectations of how young people revise and the amount of time they are able to revise for. Some young people have the ability to retain information easily and will quite happily revise for hours however, others may find it difficult to maintain focus for this long. Talk to your child about what works for them and come up with an agreement together.
- Encourage your child to take regular breaks from their revision so that they are able to retain the information. If you can see that your child is beginning to lack motivation suggest that they take a break.
- Motivation for revision can sometimes become a barrier so help your child recognise what motivates them and offer incentives. For instance; “work for 30 minutes and then come downstairs for a cup of tea”.
- Make sure that your child eats well, balance their diet with some healthy foods along with a few treats for motivation!
- Ensure that your child has enough sleep especially before their exams. Make sure that they have at least half an hour downtime before they go to bed where they are away from revision and away from technology.
- Try not to add to the pressure, your child is already fully aware of the importance of their exams so try and protect them from media messages that often circulate about expected results and forthcoming exams.
- Remind your child that although exams are important they do not define who they are, talk to your child about their strengths and qualities.
- Offer them emotional connections, children can feel vulnerable and alone when they are experiencing negative emotions, sometimes all they need is some reassurance and a hug!

