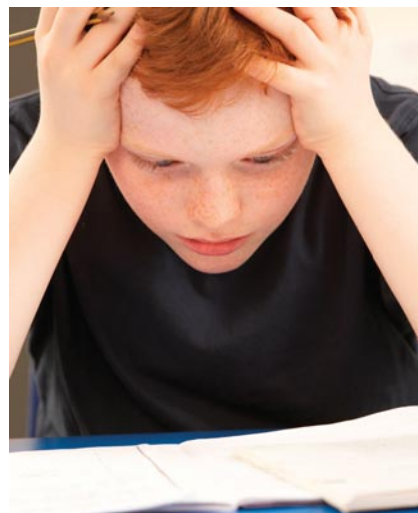


Stress-free Zone

We focus on an issue close to many a parent's heart - how your children cope with exam pressure



Music exams, GCSEs, A levels, driving test, university finals... your child is likely to sit dozens of exams in their lifetime. And in an increasingly competitive workplace, the necessity for good grades is more important than ever. But this added pressure, as well as a huge increase in the number of exams the average young person now takes, can lead to exam stress, and in turn, poor exam performance.

Many adults have experienced exam stress symptoms: shaky hands, sweaty palms, nausea, the works!

But Sean Grey, a Performance Specialist, says it's important to nip this in the bud at an early age: *"If young people can learn an effective way of dealing with stress they have a greater chance of enjoying their time in education, getting the grades they deserve and achieving their potential,"* he advises.

But for many young people, and children in particular, recognising 'exam stress' can be difficult, which is why the NSPCC encourages parents to recognise the symptoms in their child. Peta Dyke from the NSPCC says: *"Parents, family and trusted adults can help young people who may be worrying, by making space and time to ask them how they are feeling and talking to them about their concerns."*

Sally Davis, Principal of Howell's School, Llandaff, agrees that parents need to take an active role in helping their children with exams: *"In the Senior School*

at Howell's we encourage parents to support their daughters by being a study buddy and testing them on definitions, helping to come up with songs and rhymes which aid the memory and using actions wherever

possible to get all the senses working together," she says. *"The Revision Breakfasts that we run for parents and students are also very successful. We focus on mental and physical wellbeing, with relaxation techniques and healthy eating high on the agenda."*

So what are the symptoms? Sean says common physical side effects of exam pressure are feeling sick, inability to sleep, muddled thinking, emotional and physical shaking.

To combat this he uses a form of stress therapy called Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). *"It may sound a little 'New Age,'"* he says, *"but it can be used to reduce and even eliminate test anxiety before and during exams. EFT or 'tapping' is a form of acupuncture; instead of using needles we tap on the established meridian points on the body. When someone feels anxious their nervous system is firing off and EFT can be used to focus on the negative emotion and clear it - instantly!"*

Help your child beat exam stress

■ **Watch out for stress** - Look out for signs of exam stress. Children who experience stress may be irritable, not sleep well, lose interest in food, worry a lot and appear depressed or negative.

■ **Ensure your child eats well** - A balanced diet is vital for your child's health, and can help them to feel well during exam periods.

■ **Encourage sleep** - Good sleep will improve thinking and concentration. Allow half an hour or so for kids to wind down between studying and going to bed and try and remove electronic stimulants from the bedroom (mobile phones, Xbox etc).

■ **Be flexible** - When your child is revising all day, don't worry

about household jobs that are left undone or untidy bedrooms. Staying calm yourself can help.

■ **Help them to study** - Help your child to revise by making sure they have somewhere comfortable to study. Help them draw up a revision schedule or ask the school for one.

■ **Discuss their nerves** - Remind your child that feeling nervous is normal. Being reminded of what they do know and the time they have put into study can help them feel confident.

■ **Encourage exercise** - Make sure your kids are active. Exercise can help boost energy levels, clear the mind and relieve stress.

■ **Don't add to the pressure** - Support group ChildLine says that many of the children who contact them feel that the greatest pressure at exam time comes from their family. Make sure they know that failing isn't the end of the world, and that if things don't go well they may be able to take the exam again.

■ **Make time for treats** - When the exams are over, help celebrate with a treat. These can be a real encouragement for the next time they have a test.

SOURCE: NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk)

Contacts

www.stagefrightfreedom.com
www.nspcc.org.uk
www.howells-cardiff.gdst.net