

## Last-minute exam tips... for parents

### 10 answers may surprise you

This is the time of year when parents typically hover over their children's screens, draw up timetables and emphasize the value of good grades. It feels like the right and responsible thing to do.

From your teenager's perspective, however, this approach isn't necessarily helpful. In fact, it may even backfire. Why? Because youngsters tire of being told that good grades secure good jobs. They hear this in school assembly, they discuss it with their friends, their teachers talk about it in class.

Too much emphasis on exam results can trigger anxiety and panic in young people. In the short term, a little fear may well motivate. Prolonged fear, however, simply wears people down. Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, puts it clearly: 'Stress makes people stupid'.

Every year, this fact is played out across the nation. Come springtime, many GCSE and A-level students have little else on their minds than lists of their grade achievements (or failures). Some respond by swotting mindlessly; others may shun their desks altogether, frozen in silent panic. None of this does their exam results much good.

So put your pep talks aside, and aim instead to relieve your teenager of exam anxiety by taking these ten steps to boost their confidence and their grades.

1) **Spot fear.** While some teenagers admit very readily to feeling scared, many will do their utmost to cover up all signs of 'weakness'. If they also lack the skills to articulate their problems and resolve them, this only leaves them limited options such as slamming doors, angry outbursts and sullen silences. Understand all these as calls for help.

2) **Avoid aggravating fear.** Even a well-intentioned question such as, 'Shouldn't you be working?' can send waves of panic out to your child. Teenagers are highly sensitive to their parents' communications (though again, some will hide this sensitivity very well). Your teenager may be willing to provide you with a list of things you say and do that help or hinder their motivation and revision.

3) **Enable, but don't invest.** As teenagers grow up, a parent's role becomes, increasingly, to facilitate and enable. In the revision season, you can lend your support by providing, say, meals, materials and a conducive work environment. But if you start to control how they spend their time, or dictate their work priorities, your attachment to their goals may make it harder for them to realise them. Teenagers work best when encouraged to take ownership of their work.

4) **Keep exams in healthy perspective.** In the run-up to exams, schools often ramp up the pressure, and options may seem to narrow. Your teenager may therefore be painfully unaware of the wide range of training and career choices that undoubtedly remain available to them even if they fail to make the grade. Young people need to see that life is full of options and possibilities, and parents are often best placed to help their children find out about courses, resits and gap year activities that truly meet their individual needs and capabilities.

5) **Tell them they're ok.** Your teenager may need you to spell out a few of their personal, interpersonal, technical and creative talents. For instance, social and networking skills often attract considerable disapproval in class, yet these are fundamental to many career paths.

6) **Avoid polarising their future.** It isn't a case of 'good results or stacking shelves at Tesco's'.

7) **Don't compare.** Brothers, sisters and cousins perform differently. Don't make a big deal of it either way: even favourable comparisons can cause stress.

8) **Affirm the value of good work, not hard work.** Preparing for exams doesn't necessarily mean putting in long hours. Students who take breaks and prioritise perform better than swots whose idea of revision is to learn their syllabus off by heart.

9) **Stay resolutely positive.** If your teen panics that they've left everything to the last minute, assure them that it's possible to do plenty of useful work in little time, and hold your nerve.