

ISPCC
ALWAYS HERE FOR CHILDREN



Coping with Exam Pressure

Advice for Parents

Coping with Exam Pressure - Advice for Parents.

Exam times bring with them varying levels of stress and anxiety for both children and parents. For the children the stress is more direct and obvious. Thoughts like "have I done enough study, could I do more?" "I'm running out of time". "I'm no good at remembering details" "I hate this subject" and many more run through our children's minds and often result in high levels of stress.

Parents are not immune to this either. We worry about our children. We don't want to see them in distress, but similarly we can't do everything for them; otherwise they would never learn for themselves and experience the feeling of achievement that working through a stressful situation can bring.

So how do we balance the support we can offer as parents and give enough leeway to our children so they can grow and respond positively to a regular life occurrence like stress?

When it comes to exam time, there are some steadfast and simple things any parent can do and say to their children:

- Remain calm and relaxed when talking with your child. Children can sense stress in their parents quite easily and do not need this extra burden on them during exam times. Many parents will remember their own feelings associated with exams and need to learn from it. Be supportive.
- Parents need to reduce their own stress levels associated with their children's exam times, so focus on what works best for you in this regard. Perhaps go for a walk, play a sport or any activity that can release nervous tension and distract the mind.
- Depending on your child's levels of organisation, it might be helpful to go through their study plan, helping them to break up their work into manageable pieces and making sure they schedule enough social time for a healthy balance.
- Keep an eye out for changes in behaviour. As parents we should look to see how our children are responding to, and managing, their stress levels. If there are any notable changes in how they behave then have a chat and ask them how you can help. This simple act may be enough in itself, as your child will feel listened to and supported.

- Ensure your child is eating normally. Often exam pressures mean your child eats snack foods and misses out on a nutritious and balanced diet.
- Children often want to study late and for longer hours (cramming) which eats into sleeping time. It is very important that children have a sufficient amount of sleep so they can function normally. Proper levels of sleep aid the memory process and make children less cranky.
- Keep it real. Exams like the Junior and Leaving cert are not the 'be all and end all' of your child's life. We are more defined by how we act and respond to life events than by the score we achieve on a test. There are always options out there.
- Try not to make too many demands on your child at this time as any ensuing arguments will be entirely counterproductive. That said, children still have responsibilities they need to maintain.
- Most of all, make sure your child knows you are there to support them unconditionally regardless of the exam results.

So parents, remember, we should support our children as far as is helpful, but we must also let them learn for themselves. The transition into adulthood brings with it a series of demands and expectations and our children need to achieve these for themselves.

We can aid them in this process by being a sounding board for their frustrations and ideas. Lend a listening ear so they feel supported and cared for, and can then approach their exams with confidence.

ISPCC Support Line

For free advice and support you can contact the ISPCC Support Line on **(01) 676 7960** Monday to Friday 9am-5pm. To find out more please go to www.ispcc.ie