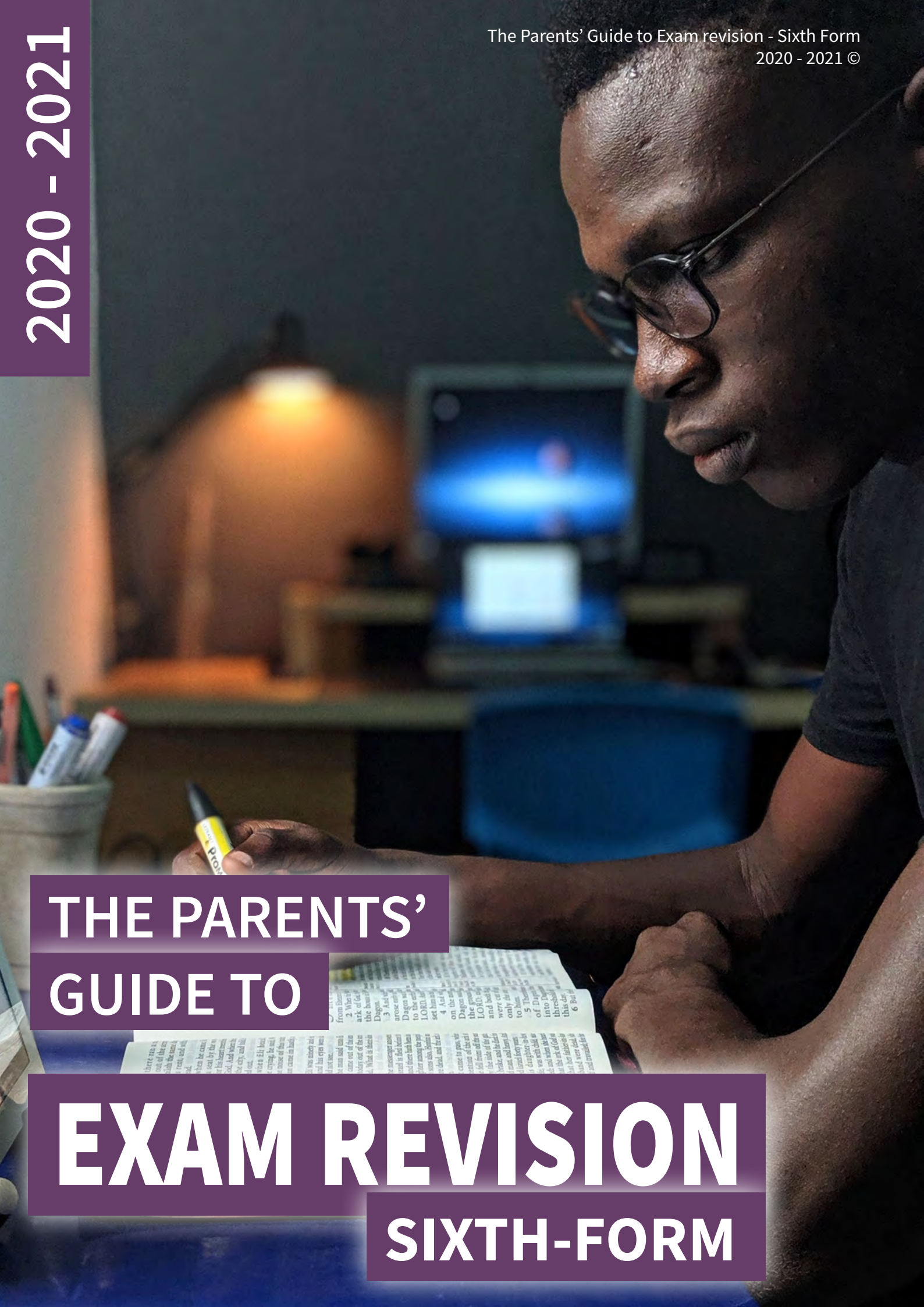


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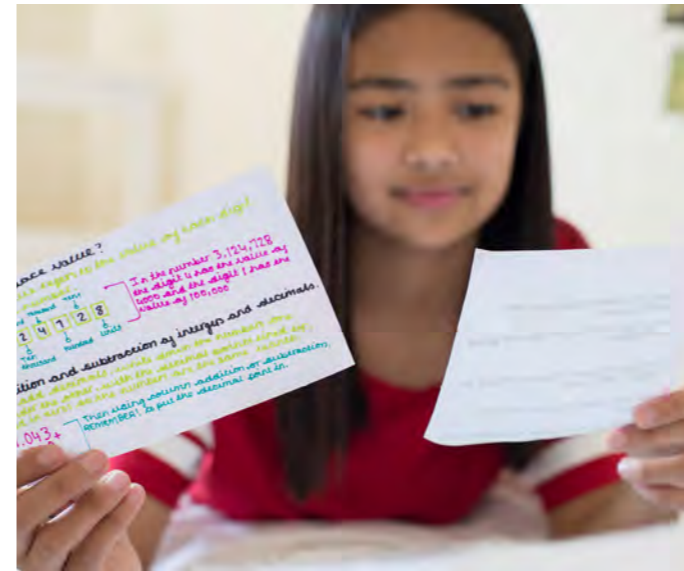
The Parents' Guide to Exam revision - Sixth Form  
2020 - 2021 ©

THE PARENTS'  
GUIDE TO


EXAM REVISION  
SIXTH-FORM



# CONTENTS



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**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IS KEY  
TO STUDENT SUCCESS**



# Introduction

We want our children to do well in exams and effective revision plays a crucial role. Whilst you can't revise for your child, there are lots of ways you can help them revise for themselves. This ranges from spending time with them to checking what they know and helping them remember things, to providing the right homelife so that they can be at their most alert, healthy and resilient.

During sixth form, schools and colleges actively encourage independent study to help prepare students that want to go on to further education, where they will be expected to take a more proactive approach to finding out information for themselves. Sixth Form is a transition period and there are many ways where your children will benefit from your support and encouragement while they are finding out more about which ways of learning suit them most.

Effective revision requires developing and growing essential life skills, such as good time management; the ability to deal with situations when things go wrong; and finding the right balance between work and play. These are areas where you have lots of experience and can help them develop systems that work best for them.

This guide shows how to support them in making revision time as productive and helpful as possible, helping them keep a balanced lifestyle, and hints and tips on providing a homelife that encourages success. We've mostly focused on long-term support, but there are also some pointers on how you can help just ahead of examinations when the pressure is especially high.

## Join us

If you're interested in regular updates about other ways you can help your teenage children, *click here* and join our online community.

*I'm interactive!  
Click me to join*

# Sleep

Sleep is an essential element for optimum health, so make sure your child is getting enough rest. Teenagers need a lot of sleep given the huge changes taking place in their bodies – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night. Tempting though it may be for them to revise into the small hours, they will be much better off putting work aside and settling down for an early night. Work backwards! If they have to get up at 7.00 am, then they need to be asleep by 11.00 pm – which probably means being in bed much earlier.

**TEENAGERS NEED ABOUT EIGHT TO TEN HOURS OF SLEEP EACH NIGHT**



## Mobiles, screens and sleep

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by ready access to a 24/7 online community via their phones such as Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp and other messaging services, not to mention their compulsion to play games and catch up with box sets late into the night.

To combat this you may want to minimise the number of screens they have in the bedroom, encourage them to have at least 30 mins screen-free time before settling down to sleep and get them to use night screen settings in the evening to reduce glare (white light on bright screens prevent sleepiness). Phones should be set to silent at bedtime so that sleep is not interrupted by phone notifications.

## A bedtime routine

Creating a “bedtime” routine, such as switching the phone to silent, putting it away, taking a bath, having a hot drink and dimming the lights can all help calm the mind and prepare it for sleep. Keeping a notebook where any worries or important things to do the next day can be jotted down can help prevent the mind turning over once the lights go out and fretting about forgetting things thus preventing sleep.

Sticking to a similar routine every night signals to the body that it is time for bed and helps it switch off so try to get your child into the habit of doing the same things before bed and going to sleep at a similar time (especially on week nights).

## Avoid lie-ins

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning and, hard though it may be, try to limit lie-ins at the weekend. Long lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at an appropriate time on Sunday night and consequently, making it harder for them to wake up on time on Monday mornings. Where possible, bedtimes and get-up times should be similar from one day to the next allowing the body to synch to a regular cycle. Make plans for weekend mornings so they have a reason to get up.

## Walk your talk!

Are you setting a good example? It might be harder for them to get into good sleep patterns if you are not following the advice you give them.

## Useful links

NHS  
Live well

Sleep  
council  
UK

*I'm interactive!  
Click me and I'll take  
you to their website*

# Eating

Food is fuel for the body, so making sure they eat at regular intervals with plenty of healthy ingredients is vital. Try to ensure they have a healthy breakfast before leaving the house (even if it is only cereal), provide a packed lunch and a nutritious supper in the evening.

## A balanced diet

As well as their “five a day” (about a third of the overall diet), everyone should have some starchy carbohydrate (another third), and the remaining third split between protein and milk/dairy with a small amount of fat. Ensure vegetarians and vegans are getting enough protein with plenty of protein rich vegetables (such as peas, sprouts, sweet corn, asparagus, broccoli and avocado) as well as nuts, pulses and beans.

Good food choices to maximise concentration include green leafy vegetables, herbs, oily fish and pulses so try to include these as a regular part of their diet – it will be good for the whole family too!

## Useful links

[NHS - Eatwell Guide](#)

[BBC Good Food](#)

## Eating regularly

It's important that teenagers eat at regular intervals to avoid peaks and troughs in energy levels. Breakfast, lunch and dinner should be punctuated with healthy snacks. Providing a packed lunch and snacks for them when they are on the go can help ensure they are eating the right types of food. If possible, sit down for a family meal together at the end of each day (mobile and tablet free!). Not only will this start a fantastic lifestyle habit for them to take through to adulthood, it will also provide a break from being online and a chance to chat and share one another's experiences that day.



## Cook together

This provides a very good opportunity to spend time together and bond with your teens. It's a non-pressurized space for them to talk to you about things that may be troubling them without making it the central focus – you can catch up on good news too. It gives you a chance to show them how to cook well-balanced food and gives them life skills to take when they leave home (whether that's to go to work or go on to further education). It also means that, with enough practise, they'll be able to create a family dinner so the pressure isn't all on you to feed the family.

## Snacking

The temptation to eat sugary, highly salted, unhealthy snacks to keep energy levels up is not only bad for overall health but can negatively impair their performance and ability to concentrate. Help them make the right choices when they are in a hurry by providing them with healthy alternatives. If chocolate is a must, swap milk chocolate or chocolate bars for dark chocolate. This doesn't mean they can't have an occasional treat, but it's better to avoid eating high sugar and salty foods too often.

**KEEP THE HOUSE STOCKED WITH PLENTY OF HEALTHY SNACKS**



## Growing up

As your teenagers are getting older and more independent, they will be preparing food for themselves and it's not possible for you to watch what they are eating every meal time. However, where possible, provide food for them rather than money which they might be tempted to spend on unhealthy favourites. Remember, they are going to eat what you have available in the house, so if your fridge, freezer and cupboards are full of good options, that's what they'll reach for when they're hungry.

Fast food, sweets, crisps and other treats are absolutely fine, so long as they are a small part of an overall diet and not the staple foods. However, tired teenagers are often tempted by convenience and "quick fix" energy boosts so may be drawn towards unhealthy options despite your best efforts to encourage them otherwise.

## Walk your talk!

The foods you have available in your house, and what you eat will influence your child's choices. Are you being a good role model?

### Healthy snacks shopping list:

- Mixed nuts
- Raisins
- Yoghurt
- Fruit
- Dried fruit
- Popcorn
- Rice cakes
- Flapjacks
- Dark chocolate
- Carrot sticks
- Cottage cheese
- Kale chips
- Hummus
- Eggs
- Smoothies
- Olives
- Peanut butter
- Avocado
- Tuna



# Hydration

The teenage body is made up of around 60% water. Not drinking enough water reduces productivity, both mentally and physically, and symptoms can include tiredness, confusion, reduced energy levels and the temptation to snack when not actually hungry (thirst is often mistaken for hunger).

## Have water on hand at all times

The best way to make sure your child is drinking enough is to ensure they have water on hand at all times – at their desk, in bottles in their bag when on the go, and served alongside food. Plain water is ideal, but to add interest, use natural ingredients to give flavour – such as cucumber, lemon, lime, orange, tangerine, mint or ginger.

## Other drinks

Natural fruit juices are great, but can be high in natural sugar, so why not dilute them? Herbal teas or honey with a dash of lemon offer hot, caffeine free alternatives. Limit your child's fizzy drink intake – whether calorie controlled or not, including energy drinks. They are all unhealthy if drunk in large quantities.

## Useful links

NHS  
Live Well

Natural  
Hydration  
Council

## Eight glasses a day

Health experts recommend all adults to drink two or more litres of water a day. This equates to roughly eight 250ml glasses.



## Walk your talk!

If your children never sees you drinking a glass of water they are less likely to think of drinking themselves.

## KEEPING HYDRATED IMPROVES CONCENTRATION AND FOCUS



# Caffeine

Caffeine affects us in different ways, and different people are more sensitive to it than others. On average, adults shouldn't consume more than 400mg of caffeine a day and adolescents should have much less.

## Look out for caffeine consumption

Caffeine is present in coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate so keep an eye on how much of these your child consumes. Energy shots are often very high in caffeine and a firm favourite with teens. Drinks with high caffeine (more than 150mg per litre) need to show this on the label, although it is not always clear – and it doesn't apply to drinks bought in coffee shops. Lots of products high in caffeine are available in health food shops which can give the impression that they're good for wellbeing but, like many things, can be harmful if taken in large quantities.

If your child regularly drinks one or two cups of coffee each day, it's absolutely fine to continue this, even during exam time, as their body will be used to it. What's not good is introducing changes, so they shouldn't start drinking a cup of coffee or two during revision periods to help keep them alert if this is not something they do regularly. It's more likely to make them jittery, hyper and unable to concentrate.

## Energy shots and drinks

Energy shots can be deceptive as they are tiny in quantity but often packed with caffeine – for example a 60 ml shot can contain around 200mg of caffeine. Likewise, many energy drinks don't necessarily have huge percentages of caffeine, but they are served in large volumes (half litre bottles) so the amount of caffeine your child is drinking is a lot (160mg of caffeine in a can of Monster), whereas a small glass of the same product would be fine.

## Effects of caffeine

Too much caffeine can result in loss of sleep, loss of energy, low mood and low concentration – the opposite of what's needed to revise well. Caffeine is also long lasting, so drinking caffeine-high drinks in the afternoon can still impact on your child's ability to sleep that night. It's an absolute no to drinking coffee (or other caffeine fuelled drinks) late in the evening to try and overcome tiredness and revise into the night.

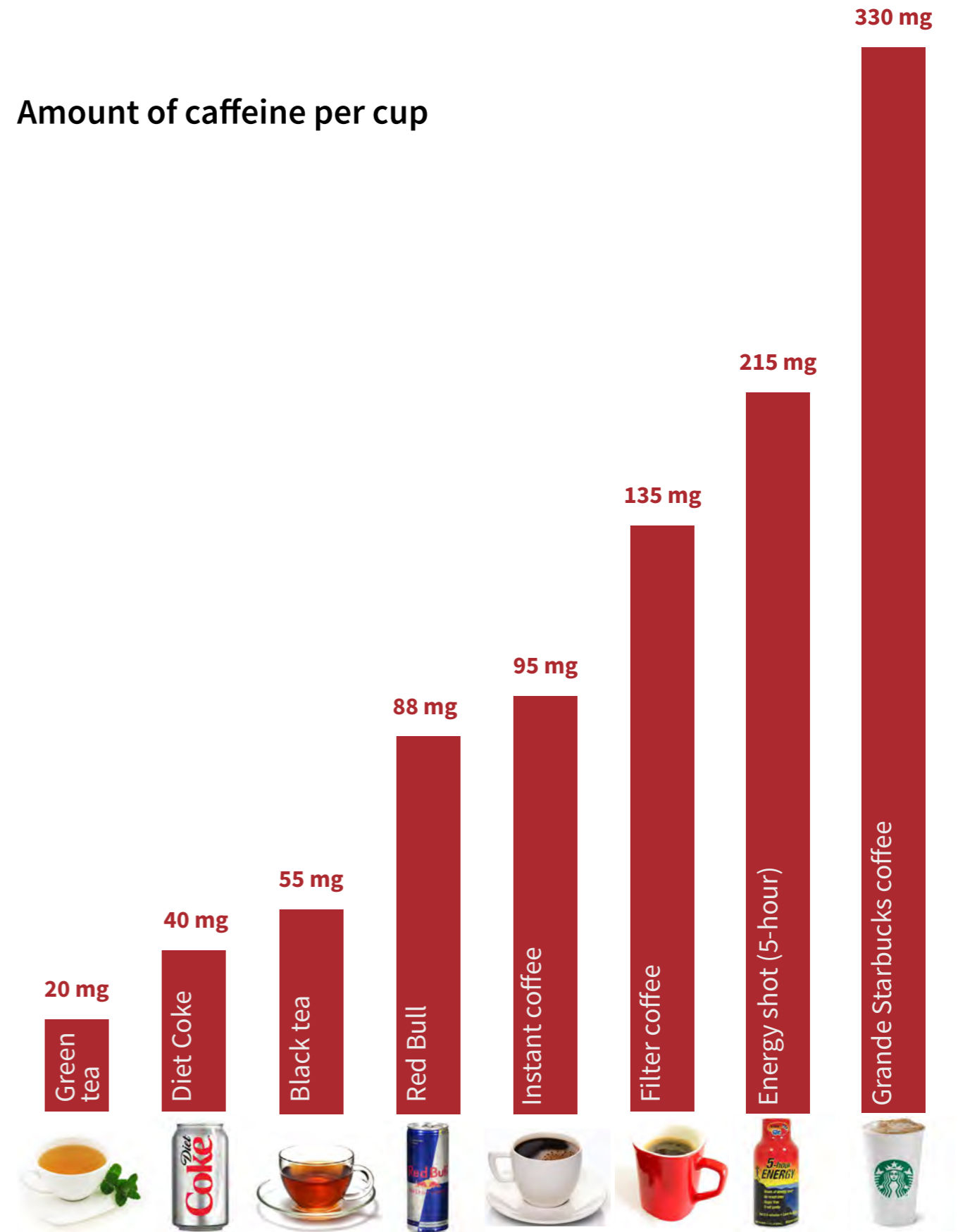
Keep an eye on their caffeine intake and, if possible, get them to avoid it completely from lunchtime as a year-round rule.

## Walk your talk!

If you're reaching for a strong coffee several times daily to try and keep your energy levels up, you're impacting your own ability to sleep at nights, as well as sending the wrong message on how to manage tiredness.

# Caffeine indicator

## Amount of caffeine per cup





# Environment

## Chatting

Teenagers have a reputation for being non-communicative, so when they do chat to you, don't be tempted to quiz them on how they're getting on with revision and studying every time! Of course you will want to show interest, but sometimes a complete break is a good thing and there are lots of other things you will want to talk to them about.

## Bedroom

A calm environment can encourage sleep, so make sure their room is a comfortable temperature; their linen is fresh, clean and cosy; they have blackout blinds/curtains to reduce light in summertime (or eyeshades if that's not possible) and that it is quiet. Of course, you can't be responsible for whether or not they keep their room tidy (although you can try to encourage it) but it is proven that a calm, uncluttered environment helps relaxation.

## Finding the right space

Help them find a calm space to revise. Things to consider are noise levels, lighting, ability to store their papers tidily, not being disturbed by other family members. Different people have different needs, for some, background music is helpful to studying, for others it's a distraction. Different locations can help some children, so rather than always working in their bedroom, they might like to use the dining room, or living area from time to time. Give your child space to work out what works best for them (which may not be what works best for you).

## Other options

If there's not a good place to revise at home, maybe they could spend time in a local library or a local café with wifi, to help inspire them by providing a different environment (and where adults working can act as role models). Varying the revision space can be helpful in creating new energy to take in things differently.

WORK WITH YOUR CHILD TO  
FIND A CALM SPACE TO  
REVISE



# Routine

Routine is important, not only when it comes to creating a revision timetable, but also for homelife in general. People respond well to routine and by creating regular activities at regular times, you are creating your own family rituals and traditions.

## Home timetable

Try to set breakfast, dinner, family time, family activities at similar times to create stability and familiarity. It can be difficult when everyone has their own schedule but it is worth having some anchor points throughout the week when you all get together, such as breakfast at 7.15 am on weekdays or at 9.00 am at weekends, or family dinners on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6.30 pm.

## Keeping routines

It's also much more difficult to "duck out" of activities when they are part of the regular routine rather than occasional exceptions. For example, if the family always spends half-an-hour together to eat and chat at around 6.00 pm, it's much more difficult to take food upstairs while revising or snack in another room than it would be if the regular routine were to eat in different places at different times. As far as you can, don't encourage your teen to take mealtimes in their room (or in front of the television).

## Improve time management

Creating regular activities at regular times of the day will help your child take breaks from revising as well as improve their time-management skills by having to organise revision around these times.

IT'S VITAL FOR EFFECTIVE STUDY THAT YOUR CHILD TAKES REGULAR BREAKS



# Taking a break

It's vital for effective study that your child takes regular breaks (both long and short) – without feeling guilty!

## Short breaks

When helping them create a revision timetable, ensure they factor in five or ten minute breaks within 30 or 60 minute study sessions. Short bursts of studying produce much better results than long stretches.

## Long breaks

It's important for them to take time out and do things they enjoy – such as watching a film, being part of their regular sports team, attending a gig, spending time with friends and family. Not only does this give the brain

a chance to switch off, refocus and assimilate information, it's an important way to find an appropriate work-play balance to ensure a productive and happy life in the long term. Try and help them ensure their breaks include a variety of different activities (not just staying in their room watching a Netflix series).

## Taking a day off

From time to time, we all need to take a break. When things get tough, it can sometimes be helpful to step away from the problem and revisit it with a calm mind and renewed outlook rather than struggle on. If, on occasion, your child doesn't stick rigidly to their revision timetable, don't worry, they are probably doing enough to stay on track.

## Ideas for revision breaks

Encourage your child to:

- Get creative, such as painting, puzzling, sewing or drawing
- Get active, such as going to the gym or playing sport
- Get some fresh air by taking a walk or sitting outside
- Go screen free and read a book or magazine
- Interact with others by chatting to a friend or family member
- Relax by taking a bath, watching an episode of their favourite TV series or listening to some music
- Refuel by preparing a healthy snack and eating it away from their desk or computer
- Recharge by having a power nap

## Being active

Being active is a key component in healthy living – both for mental and physical health. If you can arrange some outdoor activities with your child this will not only give you some quality time together, it will ensure they are getting out in nature, taking a break from being online and getting some exercise. Active hobbies release “happy” hormones that are fantastic for regulating mood, promoting self-confidence and reducing stress.

Doing active things as a family not only helps bond but also creates an expectation that life should include “doing” (being physical in some way) as well as “resting” (such as watching TV or going to the cinema). Good examples include going for a walk together, joining *Parkrun* on Saturday mornings, taking a day out to a castle or local attraction, visiting a national park or city farm. If the weather's poor, there's ten-pin bowling, table tennis, visiting a museum or stately home, ice-skating, swimming or

visiting an aquarium.\*

Of course, it's great if you can do some activities together, but they'll also want to exercise alone or with friends. This can also increase the chances of them having life-long healthy habits as well as releasing energy and making themselves physically tired (instead of just mentally tired, which can make it hard to sleep).

If your child is not keen on being active (for example they don't like swimming, playing sports, running or dancing) encourage them to take regular walks to boost circulation, stretch their muscles and be outdoors. It is very important that they spend some time being active outside every week.

**\*Some activities and attractions are likely to close, given the current circumstances. Listen carefully to the guidance given by the government and limit all social interaction if you or your child display flu-like symptoms.**

### Useful links

Health for  
teens UK

NHS  
Live Well



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some pages*

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Scroll on for next chapter

# Planning

Sit with your child and help them work out a revision timetable, planning months ahead of exam time - not just weeks before! Smaller, regular revisions sessions are usually much more productive than cramming (or leaving everything until the last minute, which increases stress) so starting revision well in advance is a good strategy. Also, it leaves time to adjust and adapt if what seemed like a good idea in theory doesn't prove as helpful in practice.

If your child is well organised and wants to create their own timetable without your help, fantastic! If possible, get them to share it with you and talk through why they've structured it the way they have so you can help tweak it early on if you spot areas that could be improved.

## Useful links

Revision  
template

*Download me!*

## Goal setting

As well as long term goals (i.e. passing the exams), help them break down their different revision goals, so they will get a sense of achievement after every revision session. Feeling that they have done what they set out to do will positively reinforce and encourage them to start their next revision session feeling capable rather than over-whelmed.

## Keep subject focus

Try to stick to just one or two subjects on weeknights to help them stay focused and block the sessions into chunks with short breaks in between. For example, rather than suggest revision from 7 pm until 9 pm, have revision in 25 minute stretches with five minute breaks in between. This doesn't mean they can't spend 50 minutes on one subject, it just allows them to rest their eyes and change thinking patterns by taking a break in between. Where possible, maximise opportunities to study during the day (i.e. at the times to when examinations will take place) as recollection can be better at a similar time of day as when the original memory was created.

## Factor in relaxation time

You can also make sure they are taking longer breaks by including activities that are not related to revision so that they can still enjoy time with friends and family and their hobbies. Even in the lead up to exam time, taking time out is important.

## Be strict yet flexible

Part of the value in creating a revision timetable is to ensure all topics are covered in the lead up to exams, rather than your child getting side-tracked by one subject they either find very difficult or prefer doing. Sticking to the timetable is important and promotes self-discipline. However, sometimes things take longer than expected, so don't get cross if your child deviates from the plan. A good idea is to factor in some unassigned revision time to make flexibility easier.

**A REVISION TIMETABLE WILL HELP STRUCTURE REVISION AND KEEP YOUR CHILD FOCUSED**



## Revision timetable - Easter holiday

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8am	<b>Economics</b> Revise unit 1 key words	<b>Geography</b> Make note on case studies	<b>Business exam</b> paper 1 - timed conditions (2hr)	Family breakfast	Time off	<b>Economics</b> Practice Section A Qs	
9am	<b>Geography</b> Revise rivers	Guitar lesson				<b>Economics</b> Make notes on unit 2	
10am	<b>Geography</b> Essay question on rivers					<b>Economics</b> Make flash cards	
11am	<b>Economics</b> Revise unit 1 diagrams	<b>Geography</b> Make notes on case studies	Time off	<b>Geography</b> Revise paper 1 notes	<b>Business</b> Revise product life cycle		
LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH		LUNCH	LUNCH		
2pm	<b>Business</b> Revise product life cycle	<b>Economics</b> Revise globalization		Netball club and swim lesson	<b>Geography</b> exam paper 1 - timed conditions (90mins)	<b>Business</b> Revise product life cycle	
3pm	<b>Business</b> Revise break even graph	<b>Economics</b> Revise free trade	<b>Economics / Business</b>				
4pm	<b>Economics / Business</b>	<b>Business</b> Revise business law	Dinner and cinema		Evening off		
5pm	Gym	Time off					
6pm	Time off	Time off					
Evening	<b>Geography</b> Look through unit 1 notes	<b>Economics</b> Look over formulas	<b>Geography</b> Look through unit 1 notes				

# Understanding their revision style

Every child works differently and what works for one child may not work at all for another. However, in broad terms, there are four different learning styles and, whilst using a combination of these styles can be effective (and indeed, some styles overlap), some children (and as adults later) will exhibit a preference for one style over another – it just seems

to make learning easier for them. If you haven't already, identify what learning style works best for your child and help them construct revision around this learning style to make study sessions more productive and less boring. If they have a preference for digesting information in a specific way, it will be more interesting and stimulating for them.

## Visual Learners

Visual learners prefer colour and pictures, so they should work around these themes:

1. make their notes colourful, with different colour pens, paper, highlighters and post-its;
2. use images and pictures instead of words;
3. use symbols to represent key messages;
4. use maps and charts where possible;
5. adapt text to flow charts;
6. express change and ideas in diagrams;
7. use doodles when note taking.



## Reading writing

For some, the traditional method of reading and writing still works best, so they should work around these themes:

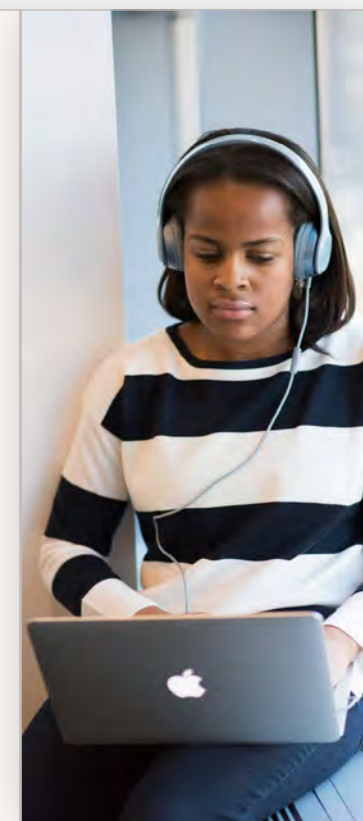
1. Take lots of notes (both during lessons and during study);
2. Re-write notes in different styles;
3. Do lots of practice papers;
4. Use post-it notes to emphasis key points;
5. Use highlighters to make important items stand out;
6. Read books, online articles, magazines and their own notes.



## Auditory

Auditory learners prefer to listen and speak, so they should work around these themes:

1. listening to pod casts and audio books where the information they should learn is spoken aloud;
2. joining study groups so they can listen and talk over ideas with others;
3. listen to speakers/teachers/lecturers whether in live sessions or online;
4. engage with you by talking, discussing and explaining what they know;
5. using sound and music to help them learn;
6. teaching (or pretending to teach) others to demonstrate knowledge;
7. speaking answers to past papers aloud.



## Tactile Learners

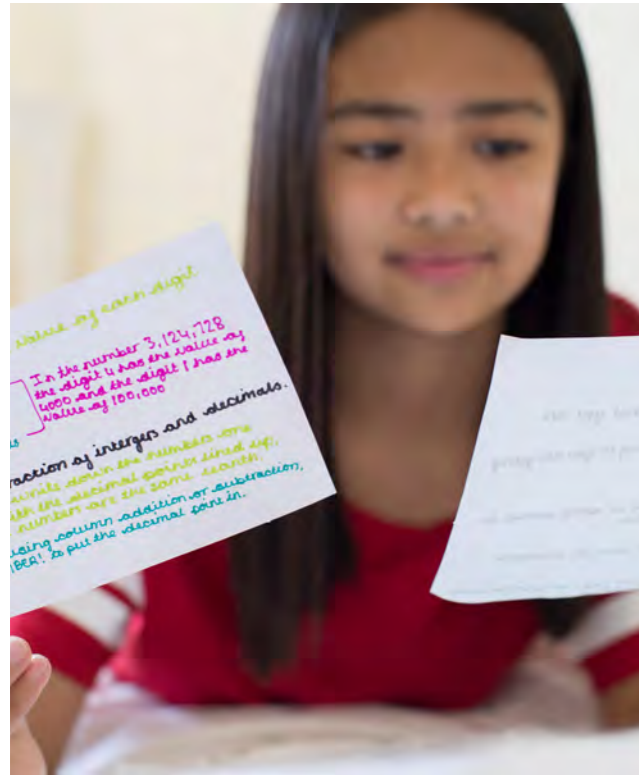
For others, their preferred method of learning is through action or movement. This is good for practical areas, such as experiments in science and drama, but can require a little extra imagination to help them translate theory to practice.

1. Where possible, do the activity themselves (cooking, carpentry, design);
2. Use real life examples to help them understand abstract concepts;
3. Take frequent breaks to enable them to be active;
4. Use art and drawing to help memorize ideas and themes;
5. Study in groups and act out the material;
6. Make study sheets and flash cards to help memorize information;
7. Watching videos of people doing the activity (when they can't do it themselves).





## Ways you can help



### Practise and repetition

If you have the time and it's something they'd find helpful, give them the chance to recite, repeat and practise what they've learnt with you. Even if you don't know the answers, the opportunity to say out loud what's in their mind can help clarify whether they have grasped the concepts or whether they are still hazy. This style of revising might not appeal to those who prefer reading/writing, but it's especially useful to aural and tactile learners.

Other ways you might be able to help is using quizzes, mind maps, white boards, multiple choice or sound bites to see what they've learned.



### Host a revision day\*

Revising together can also help, so encourage them to revise with friends if it's something they enjoy. This gives them a chance to test one another, swap revision notes and revise in different atmospheres. But don't compare! Everyone is different, so whilst it's fine to hear how other children are revising (either directly from them or via their parents) it doesn't mean they are doing better or worse than your child.

**\*This may not be appropriate given the current circumstances. Listen carefully to the guidance given by the government and limit all social interaction if you or your child display flu-like symptoms.**



### Timed exams / questions

Closer to the exams your child will benefit from completing a number of past exam questions. Help them prepare by creating an environment that resembles the conditions they are likely to experience in the exam hall - minimise external sounds, setup a clear desk and if you can, locate a single clock to encourage your child to time manage under test conditions. Once the allocated time has come to an end, get your child to stop writing as they may be tempted to continue. If they did not finish get them to reflect on the reasons why. Do they need to do more revision, improve their time management or work on their exam technique?



### Act as the student

Another effective revision technique is to encourage your child to speak through their subject knowledge. By taking on the role of the student, ask your child to explain a topic from one of their subjects. Listen carefully and don't be afraid to ask them a question if you do not fully understand what they are saying. Studies have shown that one of the best ways to revise is by teaching others.



## More ways you can help

### Memory

Research indicates we retain different amounts of information depending on how we receive it. Most people only remember 10% of what they have read for the first time, whereas they will remember 30% if they have watched a demonstration.

It's a good idea for your child to use lots of different ways of reviewing the same information which will help them remember more over longer periods of time. Use this in combination with their preferred learning style (page 28) for maximum effect.

### Motivating them to revise

Don't be tempted to use bribery (such as financial incentives or exemption from chores) to get them to revise. They are doing this for them, not you! However, encourage them to be motivated by helping them visualise how their revision and examinations are connected to their goals and ambitions and rewarding them when they work hard with treats such as making their favourite dinner or watching a film together.

### Prepare yourself

If your child's forgetful in giving you their examination timetable, arrange to get one for yourself from their school or college: that way there are no nasty surprises! Put their exams and important dates in your own calendar or diary so that you don't forget what's coming up.

Don't make arrangements for big days out or several days away from home during intense revision time (i.e. just before exams). It can be both distracting and unsettling to have a packed agenda when their focus should be on revision. This does not include shorter family outings (for a couple of hours or half a day) to make sure they take rest time.

### Year 13

Make sure you're familiar with the rhythm of Year 13 so you are aware of challenging periods. That way you can avoid making arrangements that might put too many demands on their time.

# Key milestones

SEPTEMBER 2020

## UCAS references

As University applications are being prepared, subject teachers are beginning to write your child's references (including their predicted grades). A good work ethic and early revision is a positive approach.

## Back to school

Your child may or may not have exams as they begin their Yr 13 journey; however it is essential that they start the year as they mean to go on. Help them prepare a clear space for study.

OCTOBER

DECEMBER

## Mock examinations

Try to approach these with an attitude similar to those of the official exams. Mimicking exam conditions will help reduce nerves when the final exams begin.

## Christmas holidays

Most schools will schedule mock examinations either just before or just after the Christmas holidays. Encourage your child to approach the holiday period maturely with a healthy balance between revision and socialising.

JANUARY 2021

APRIL

## Easter holidays

The emphasis here is independent learning. Schools are closed for 2-3 weeks and your child will have a significant period of time to revise and study. If your child hasn't created a revision timetable yet, now is the time. This will help focus and structure their revision efforts.

MAY

## May half-term / examinations

Your child may or may not have completed some of their exams already. May half-term is a crucial time for consolidation and reflecting on their past exam performance.

JUNE

## Examinations

This should not be a time for cramming.



# During exam time

Feeling in control will be very important to their mindset when entering an exam. Being late, rushed and forgetting things has the opposite effect. Yes, they are almost adults, but exam time is stressful and a little pampering might help. Spend time with them the evening before the exam going through all the things they will need and making sure they have packed them in their bag (pens, pencils, ruler paper, dictionary, calculator etc).

## Help them prepare

Have all the clothes they plan to wear ready (so there is no last minute searching!) and help them consider what they need. It may be summertime and very warm outside, but if there is air-conditioning in the examination centre, they'll want something warm to slip over summer shirts and blouses.

Prepare lunch, snacks and a clear water bottle for them to take with them – as well as making sure they have set their alarm leaving enough time for them to have a healthy breakfast and wake up fully before heading to the exam.

## Eating

Ideally your child should eat a healthy breakfast ahead of morning exams. If they are not keen on eating first thing in the morning, then make something that they can take with them and eat once they've arrived at school – ensuring they have left enough time to eat it before the exam starts! Entering a long exam on an empty stomach won't help them perform well.

Don't let them have too many stimulants before an exam. They might be tempted to fuel themselves with sugar, caffeine or taurine, whilst this could produce a temporary high it's possible they might be too hyped to focus calmly at the beginning of the exam, and then find their energy levels dipping significantly half way through, making them sleepy. It's fine for them to have a coffee if that's what they usually do – but not if they don't.

If they are doing two exams in one day, they'll need something to revitalise them at lunchtime and a water bottle they can refill to ensure they're drinking enough. If mints and gum are permitted in the examination centre, it might help concentration.

**EXAM TIME CAN BE STRESSFUL  
SO HELP YOUR CHILD  
FEEL IN CONTROL**



## Drinking

It's great for them to be fully hydrated before an exam, but if they have too many fluids they may frequently need the bathroom, so strike a balance!

## Getting there

Whether they are travelling alone or you're taking them, allow plenty of time in case there are delays on the way. Don't assume

that the journey will be traffic or accident free, even if it's a route you take on a regular basis, allow extra time. Your child will want to familiarise themselves with their surroundings, may wish to use the rest room, perhaps have a snack before the exam (food is not usually allowed). Once an exam has started, most centres won't allow late entrants because it unfairly disturbs other students and, no matter how earnest, exceptions will not be made.

## REDUCE MORNING STRESS BY PLANNING AHEAD



## CHECKLIST:

Avoid any last-minute stress on the morning of the exam by preparing the night before.

- Double-check the date, time and location of their exam
- Have they prepared the equipment they will need for their exam including special equipment, such as a calculator, dictionary, protractor. These should be kept in a clear case
- They will need a watch (no smart watches) to help them keep to time during the exam
- Make sure they get their clothes ready to avoid any morning rush
- Make sure your house is fully stocked for a healthy breakfast
- Make sure they've packed a clear water bottle - hydration is important!
- Try to encourage them to have an early night. It's OK for them to do some light revision the night before, but they should not be cramming late into the night

# Supporting your child

## Be positive

Be positive and reassure them about what they have achieved to help boost their confidence before going into an exam. Don't add to their stress by telling them they haven't done enough (even if that's what you think!) and remind them that failing the exam is not the end of the world. They can always retake it or choose to do something else.

## Be interested

Give your child an opportunity to chat with you after each exam to talk through how they felt it went, if that's what they want to do. Focus on the positives where you can – rather than the areas they struggled with. Remember, once an exam is over they can't change their answers, so focus on what's coming up and can be positively influenced.

## General health

Getting enough sleep, eating well, drinking plenty of water, being active, taking time out are all essential for performing well during exams, so pay special attention to these areas and try to help your child do as many of the right things as possible.

## Useful links

Mumsnet

## Cramming

The night before or morning of the exam is not the right time to start trying to learn new information, so as far as you can, help them to avoid this type of panicked learning. It's fine for them to go over notes they've already made and reviewed several times already but it's better to avoid trying to learn something new.

## Household chores

Give your children a break from household chores during exam time. They are under enough pressure, so let them off the extra work until exams are over.

## Talk about exam nerves

Exams make some people more nervous than others. If they are nervous, reassure them that it's completely natural to feel anxious about taking exams and give them space to explain to you how they are feeling and whether the nerves are manifesting in physical or mental symptoms. Don't make them feel anxious about feeling anxious!

If you are concerned about their levels of anxiety, see more detail in **Chapter 5, Exam Anxiety**.



# Exam anxiety

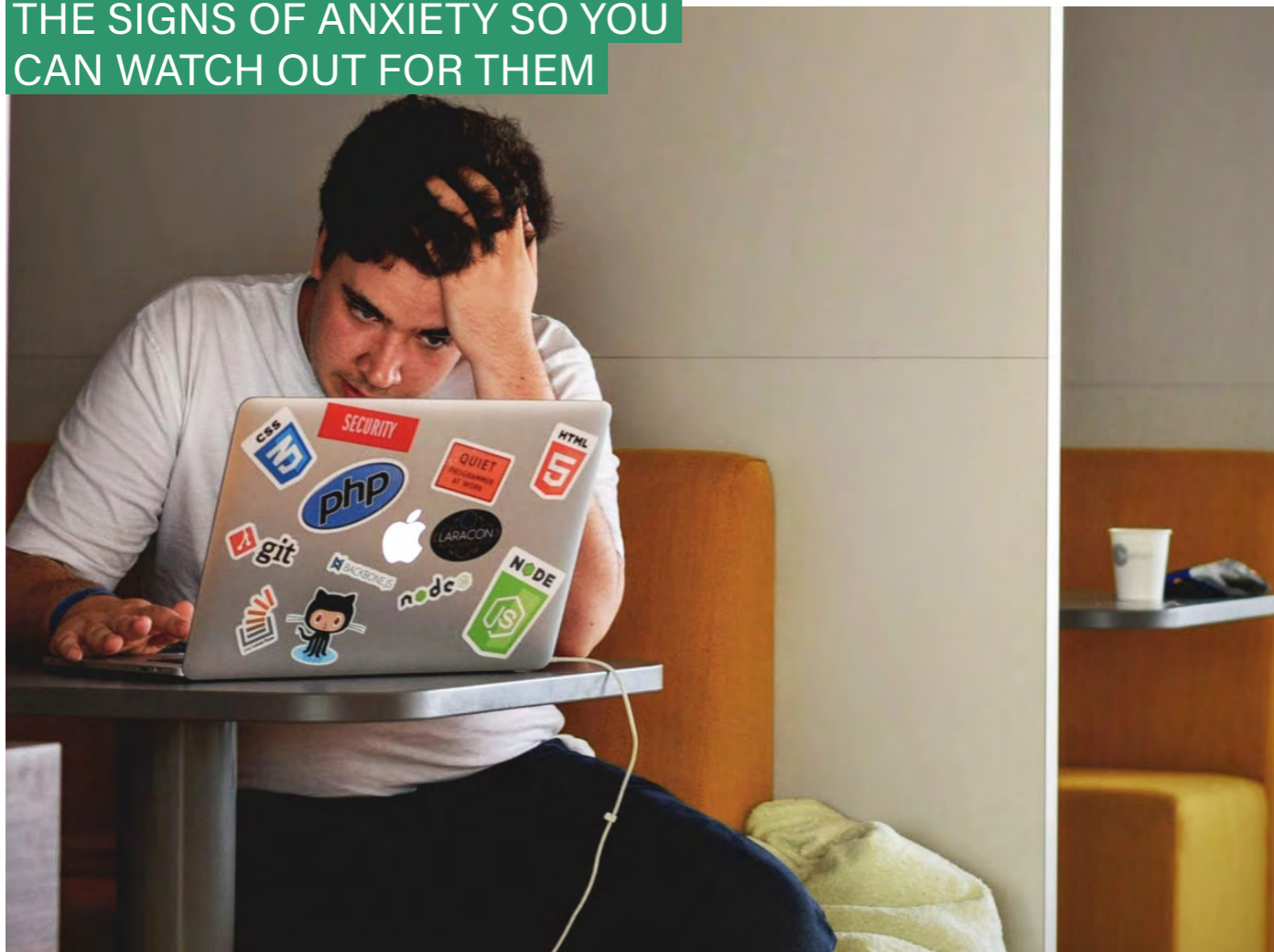
It's perfectly natural for your child to be worried about taking exams and how they will perform – you might even be a little worried too!

In small doses, anxiety can be a good thing: helping your child to focus, get motivated to study and even recall answers they were unaware they'd learnt.

Prolonged periods or bouts of intense anxiety may have a negative impact, but there are lots of ways you can help them manage this anxiety and use routines to help keep them calm. If you haven't introduced them to some of these techniques already, we've included some suggestions.

However, in some cases there can be times when anxiety reaches exceptional levels and professional support is required. How can you tell the difference?

IT'S GOOD TO BE AWARE OF THE SIGNS OF ANXIETY SO YOU CAN WATCH OUT FOR THEM



## Signs of anxiety and stress

It's good to be aware of the signs of anxiety and stress so you can watch out for them. A change in behaviour for a day or two might be nothing to worry about, but if you notice a regular change, then it's usually a sign that something is wrong. Some of the more common signs of anxiety include:

- Losing interest in things they've previously enjoyed;
- Behaving in the opposite way to usual – quiet children can become very chatty, chatty children can get withdrawn;
- Being grumpy and irritable;
- Lots of headaches and digestive problems (stomach aches, diarrhoea, constipation, vomiting etc);
- Worrying all the time, this can show itself in only picturing negative outcomes (what if I fail, I'm going to fail, I can't do this);
- Talking over and over the same concern and being unable to either stop thinking about it or to find relief;
- Physical symptoms (sweaty palms, shaking, fast heartbeat, aching muscles);
- Restlessness and being unable to stay still;
- Inability to concentrate (such as taking in what's happening in a TV programme);
- Panic attacks;
- Not sleeping.

Remember to keep perspective. If they have had several late nights, they are likely to be tired and this increases irritability. If they've been exercising, they might have aching muscles. If they've just run to meet you, they'll have a fast heart rate. Individual or a short-term combination of the above symptoms are normal.

## How to help

If you notice your child is suffering, it's time to help them. That doesn't always mean you stepping in (that could add to the anxiety) although it's good to let them know you've noticed something's wrong and give them a chance to talk to you if they want to. Avoid broaching the subject in front of others, this could make them feel embarrassed or inadequate and make them feel worse (they might think they are doing a job good of hiding it). Don't forget, the aim isn't to eliminate anxiety but to teach them how to manage it.

There are two ways to help. Encourage them to take part in an activity that will provide a distraction so they stop thinking about whatever is making them anxious. Giving the brain some time out from worrying can help obtain a better perspective later.

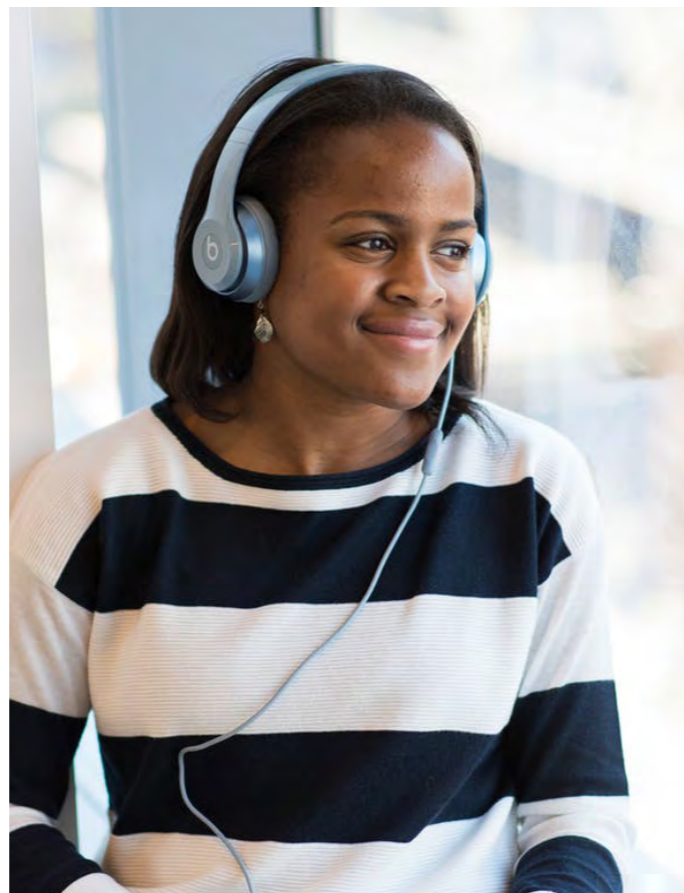
### Useful links

Anxiety UK

Childline

**Physical activities** – It doesn't matter what activity - dancing, football, swimming, walking – so long as it's something they enjoy, gets their endorphins flowing and requires focus so the mind is concentrating on something different. Team games are great, as connectivity and communications with others is restorative.

**Music** – Music has an amazing ability to transport you to a different time and place. Anything that evokes positive memories and experiences is a good thing. To reduce anxiety, it's better to listen to relaxing and calming music rather than something that stimulates.



**Talking** – it may not be to you! A sibling, grandparent, family friend or friend at school or perhaps a charity chatline. Expressing worries out loud can sometimes make them feel less significant than when they're playing on loop in the mind. Talking aloud also encourages finding their own solutions – prompts such as 'what would need to happen to make you feel better', can help them reframe to seeking solutions rather than dwelling on troubles.

**Avoiding stimulants** – bright lights, loud music, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, too much excitement (a thrilling computer game, exciting movie) can all promote adrenaline production and increase feelings of anxiety, so these are best avoided.

Reducing lighting (have dimmable lights or table lamps in the bedroom) also helps to increase feelings of calm and can help prepare for sleep.

EXPRESSING WORRIES OUT LOUD CAN SOMETIMES MAKE THEM FEEL LESS SIGNIFICANT





The second way to help is to provide an opportunity for them to learn some proven techniques which help reduce anxiety. It's a really good idea for your child to practise some of these methods when they're not anxious, so they can familiarise themselves with the approaches and get comfortable with the experience and how it makes them feel. Then, should anxiety strike, it's something they're relaxed about doing. Regularly practising relaxation techniques helps keep anxiety at bay too. Some good choices are:

**Mindfulness** with meditation, breathing techniques, visualisation or yoga. Anxiety can induce rapid, shallow breathing which encourages the heart to beat faster to try and compensate for lack of oxygen. Learning slow breathing and how to take deep breaths has an immediate physical effect and is particularly useful in preventing anxiety escalating. Meditation, visualisation and yoga all encourage positive breathing techniques.

Apps like Headspace can be loaded on the phone so your child readily has help to hand in any place at any time.

## PRACTISING RELAXATION TECHNIQUES CAN HELP REDUCE FEELINGS OF ANXIETY



**Practising yoga** regularly has been proven to improve the heart rate as well as physical strength. Meditation transports the mind to a completely different place and experience. There are many different types of meditation including auditory (describing experiences) and visual (looking at something). These activities can be done in short or long bursts and alone or in groups, which makes them ideal to put into practise when on the go or needing a ready tool when nerves strike.

**Herbs and smells** – For centuries we've used herbs and smells to invoke different atmospheres. Essential oils can be burnt in diffusers, added to baths, placed on candles, mixed with water as a spritz or poured on a tissue (great for on the go and to pop in a pocket) and are inexpensive to buy. Some useful staples are: lemon (promotes concentration and calming); lavender (reduces stress and can help sleep), jasmine (uplifting and calming), peppermint (invigorating so helps to clear the mind) and rosemary (acts as a pick-me-up).

Herbal teas are a great caffeine free hot drink and, as well as benefiting from the smell, the herbs work within the system too. Try camomile, peppermint, lavender or lemon balm.



## Useful links

Headspace

NHS  
exam nerves

## Reflecting on your own behaviour

A common reason for children being anxious is the expectation their parents have and the worry that they cannot live up to that and will let everyone down. You may unwittingly be putting pressure on your child by being positive about how well they will do. You may think you're being reassuring by saying, "of course you're going to pass every exam" and expressing your faith in them; they may misinterpret what you mean and take it that if they don't pass every exam you'll be disappointed and think less of them.

That's why it's a good idea to focus on effort rather than outcomes: "I'm really impressed that you finished your revision this afternoon" gives positive

reinforcement for something good that's been achieved, rather than "Well done, all that revision's really going to help you pass your exams" which sets an expectation for a future event yet to be achieved.

### There are other options

As an adult with your own life experience, you know that doing well in exams will open doors and provide lots of opportunities to succeed. You're keen to make their life easier. But exams are not for everyone, and if your child doesn't do well in theirs, there are plenty of other options and lots of routes to success. Keep this front of mind so you don't give them the impression the world starts and ends with their exams.

REDUCE EXAM NERVES BY  
FOCUSING ON EFFORT  
RATHER THAN OUTCOMES



## Where to get support

Professional support includes more than counsellors and psychiatrists (although both these approaches can be helpful). There's a range of professional options available including:

1. Teachers at school – both in an academic capacity to help understand subjects better, as tutors to help create better ways of working outside school and pastoral experts who can help with emotional issues;
2. Some schools have an independent counsellor available with whom your children can talk in confidence (i.e. they will not relay the information to the school);
3. Peer support networks – these can be very helpful as speaking to someone

of a similar age can sometimes feel easier than speaking to an adult, or speaking to someone just slightly older, who has more recently been through a similar experience can be very reassuring;

4. Charities – most now offer both online and telephone support. This anonymity (i.e. not being face-to-face) can make talking over problems and worries easier.

### Too much anxiety

If your child is showing several signs of anxiety on a regular basis (several days each week) over a prolonged period of time (several weeks) then do seek help from external support services and a good place to start might be visiting your GP.

### Useful links:

**AnxietyUK**



**BIG WHITE WALL**



# Final words

Sixteen to eighteen is a very exciting period in your child's development. They are transitioning into adulthood and starting to consolidate their own ways of living and viewing the world. But these are challenging years too, with many demanding physical changes, the prospect of leaving school or college and starting afresh in a new and alien environment (whether further education or work) and the pressure of examinations.

You cannot eliminate all the stress for them but you can certainly contribute to reducing the stress and helping them find the most constructive ways to study and revise well, alongside reinforcing healthy lifestyle habits.

Where there are two parental figures at home, whether step-parents or biological parents, it's important to work as a team and keep messaging consistent. Likewise, for those parents with joint custody, agree-

ing boundaries and working together to provide similar home experiences is the most helpful way forward, though this can be difficult, especially when split-ups have been especially painful and personal wounds are yet to heal. A child that has two completely different home rules depending on which parent they are staying with receives mixed messages and will likely choose to follow the rules they prefer (which isn't necessarily the ones that put them on the best path for happiness and success).

Whilst it's important to keep the end goal in sight, don't do this at the expense of enjoying the experience of living together. Constant nagging, sending them to their rooms to revise, berating about the importance of exams or not doing enough will make both of you miserable. Be proactive in supporting them and leave space for other experiences for you both to enjoy along the way.

## Join us

If you're interested in regular updates about other ways you can help your teenage children, click here and join our online community.

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