**Let’s Talk: Exam Stress**

**Secondary**



This resource is part of our self-care suite of resources and has been co-produced, with children and young people living in Essex, for children and young people. They have also been developed and quality assured by the following stakeholders:

* Essex Educational Psychology Service
* Health Watch Essex
* Essex Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) NELFT NHS Foundation Trust
* Essex Multi-schools Council
* Essex Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) strategy team
* Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service, HCRG Care Group in partnership with Barnardos
* NELFT NHS Trust Southend, Essex, and Thurrock (SET) Child, Adolescent and Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
* Professionals in schools and settings can access all these resources via the [Essex info link SEMH portal](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/social_emotional_mental_health_portal_for_schools/Pages/Self-care-for-CYP-Library.aspx). Children and young people (CYP), parents/carers and professionals can also access these resources via the SET CAMHS website. Our self-care content can also be accessed via SET CAMHS Instagram account:

The resources are intended to be accessed by CYP independently or trusted adults use these resources with CYP through 1:1 conversation, whole school/group discussion and assemblies.

Please note: some of the content within our self-care resources may be emotive for CYP. We recommend that you make use of the ‘signposting to support’ section of this document should any of the content be triggering.

**Introduction**

Exam stress is expected, and it is something that most young people will be feeling. It is normal to feel stressed or worried about exams because they mean something. That pressure, however, can become overwhelming for some young people and can have an adverse effect on their mental health. The negative impacts can present themselves in a number of ways, including anxiety, irritability, difficulty sleeping, changes to eating habits, difficulty focusing and physical symptoms (headaches, headache or tired).

**Facts**

* **It is normal to feel anxious, stressed, or nervous about exams.** It is important to acknowledge that these do matter because this is part of the stress. It is important to know that if you are worried, it is likely to show that you care.
* **It is helpful not to compare yourself to others, for most people.** Competition may drive you, and you can use this. It can also make you feel like you are not as good as others, especially with social media. Try to remember that people are showing what they want people to see on social media, they might be struggling too.
* **It is helpful if you talk about how you are feeling.** This could be with friends because they are likely to be thinking the same as you. It could also be with teachers, parents, carers, or other key adults in your life. If they are putting too much pressure on you, it is helpful to tell them this too and talk about ways in which they can support you.
* **It is likely you will work for longer hours in periods of exams; however, you should still keep a healthy routine.** You shouldcontinue doing things that you enjoy and should keep your normal eating and bedtime routines. Getting enough quality sleep is vital for concentration. Exercise is thought to make you more productive too.
* **It is helpful to be structured and organised with your time.** This will make you more productive. Plan what you need to revise for, when you need to revise by and try to prioritise what needs more time than others (what you are most confident with, and what you are least confident with). It is helpful to create a visual, such as a revision calendar to help keep you on track. Remember the previous point, schedule in time for yourself, food, and bedtimes!



**Myth Buster**

* **You must be revising and working towards your exams at every possible moment** X

You will be much more productive if you are disciplined and set targets for revision. This means you should give yourself breaks, and you should keep on doing things you enjoy in moderation.

* **Everyone will prepare for exams in the same way** X

You have to figure out what works best for you and not compare yourself to others.

* **If you do not get the best grades, you have failed** X

You have gone through a process of learning new things and skills, and you will have done the best you can in that moment. If you feel that you have not done the best you can, there are often options you can discuss with your teacher.

* **Results are everything** X

**E**xams are important, but they will not define your life. They are a small part of your life, and you will achieve so much around those exams. If you are not an exams person, maybe you are a practical person who will achieve so much in a more practical field. It is also helpful to have a plan b in case things do not go as planned. This is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength that you can be realistic and creative with your future.

**Video clips**

Check out these videos about exams stress:

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| * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkmCZgbZv1o>   Exams and Mental Health – Voice Box (Childline) |
| * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7tMgcuGwVM>   Social Pressures at Exam Time – Voice Box (Childline) |
| <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RZ86OB9hw4>Conquering exam stress: lessons from our bodies – The Physiological Society |





**Resources**

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| * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4tNJTZHzPg>   Peak Focus music – if you like listening to music, there is study music available to listen to. It can be helpful to listen to music without lyrics to help you focus on what you are reading and revising. This particular video is just as example, just search ‘study music’ wherever you get your music from. |
| * The Pomodoro Technique – is a technique that helps concentration. You set a 25-minute timer, and then have short breaks in between the 25-minute sessions. Every 4 25-minute sessions, you take a longer break. There are apps you can use, there are also websites and YouTube videos. |
| * <https://www.explorelearning.co.uk/free-resources/creating-a-gcse-revision-timetable/>   Create a revision timetable (example above) – this will be a useful and practical tool to help you stay focused and give your life structure in a time where it is tempting to spend all your time working. Take a look here, but there are other ways to make revision timetables too. |
| * <https://www.place2be.org.uk/exams?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIqoqDkev4gwMVO5RQBh1VTgQSEAAYAiAAEgI4UvD_BwE>   Exam Stress Resources – Place2Be are a great organisation who provide support for young people and have developed a resource page for all sorts of exam-related topics. |

**Reflective questions**

(Try exploring these reflective questions with a CYP)

* What do you want to achieve in your exams?
  + How are you going to do achieve this?
  + How can other people help you best to achieve this?
* What are you most afraid of when it comes to exams?
  + How are you going to avoid this?
  + How can other people help you best to avoid this?
* What do you want to do in your life?
  + How will exams help this?
* How will you celebrate the end of exams?



**Quiz**

Once you have gone through this resource with a CYP try these quiz questions with them:

* What is the purpose of exams?
* What are you going to do to help yourself through exams?
* Do you need to be working every moment of every day?
* Should you compare you and your working habits with others?
* What signs might show that you, or your friends, are feeling overwhelmed about exams?

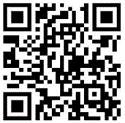
**Additional ideas**

Other things to try:

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| * Be kind to yourself |
| * Be kind to others around you |
| * Look after yourself |

**Signposting to Support**

For additional support we recommend that trusted adults use these resources to support children and young people access support when required:

* [Anna Freud Centre – On My Mind](https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/)
* [Kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com/) (Age 11-25)
* [Togetherall](https://togetherall.com/en-gb/faqs/becoming-a-member-and-managing-your-profile/#:~:text=Togetherall%20is%20only%20for%20adults,is%20only%20available%20to%2018%2B.) (age 16+)
* [Explore counselling/therapy](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/counselling/)
* [Childline](https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/mental-health/?&&&&gclsrc=aw.ds&&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIqryktIeP_wIVicPtCh3QZQs6EAAYASAAEgJr5vD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds) - 0800 1111 – [when contacting ChildLine what to expect](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KNtMOKwTco)
* [Hopeline 0800 068 41 41](https://www.papyrus-uk.org/papyrus-HOPELINE247/) offering confidential support and practical advice
* [Text ‘SHOUT’ to 85258](https://giveusashout.org/get-help/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA6vaqBhCbARIsACF9M6nG--bxZCnflhd5C3jT-d9dS48o5t6XTTTidI0MLTgwjjRAlxszRT8aAnvvEALw_wcB) for free, confidential, anonymous text support service.
* [Share any concerns about your mental health with your GP](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/seeking-help-for-a-mental-health-problem/talking-to-your-gp/) and [Understanding Confidentiality](https://www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/your-rights/understanding-confidentiality/)
* [NHS 111](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/)
* [Southend, Essex & Thurrock Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (SET CAMHS)](https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/set-camhs/)
* [Where to get urgent mental health support from: Advice from NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/)
* SET CAMHS Instagram account 

**How to help a friend**

* Share this resource with them!
* Tell them about the SET CAMHS Instagram account.
* Tell them about the Young Minds Instagram account.
* Revise together, keep each other focused using pomodoro and spend quality time together in the breaks.
* Do practice papers together and talk about the answers together before looking up the answers. This is an effective way of learning together and ensuring that you get the correct answer during your revision.

**The adult box** (for professionals and parent/carers to read)

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| * <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/exam-time/>   Exam time for parents and carers |
| * <https://www.place2be.org.uk/media/0ttpyr0h/navigating-exam-season-guide-for-parents.pdf>   Place2Be exam stress tips for parents and carers |
| * <https://www.place2be.org.uk/media/0chlxr21/navigating-exam-season-guide-for-schools.pdf>   Place2Be exam stress tips for schools |
| * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrfYcNFKi3A>   Staff to consider using the stress bucket analogy with young people but also thinking about what they can do to turn on the tap and reduce the amount of stress in young people. |

