

## **Parents: help your child through exam season**

Family homes become powder-kegs during exam season and sparks may fly. But recent research suggests that parents may be more stressed than children. Inevitably parental anxieties, even if it is tense body language rather than overt words, will be communicated to children.

Parents must exude positivity. If your child has worked well throughout the academic year tell them that this is their opportunity to demonstrate their skills. If reports have consistently shown "a could do better" theme then emphasise that many marks in exams come from following the instructions, keeping a cool head and using exam technique to make the most of the knowledge they possess. So, pull on your best "Keep Calm and Carry On" T-shirt and set the tone.

Parental anxieties are often heightened by a feeling of being powerless; not being able to help. Not only is the past, and your education, another country, they also did long division differently back then. Generally, parents should see themselves as facilitators, providing snacks and study resources, rather than educators.

A desire to protect your children from life's darker moments is innate and there are practical measures parents can take to help. Plan ahead for the examination schedule and minimise clashes with family events. Wherever possible allow your child to continue with the activities they enjoy such as music and sport. Schedule in some treats such as a cinema trip or an afternoon with their friends. A break, forgetting about revision for a few hours, can be invigorating. And generally maintaining the normal routine, providing healthy meals at regular times, and encouraging your child to switch-off and relax before going to bed at a sensible time are all vital too.

Few teenagers are able to concentrate and revise for every waking hour. Parents, should learn what their offspring are capable of and set realistic - and adaptable - expectations. Remember too, that these are irrational teenagers. They may come in from a week of exams and pack in another two hours revision on a Friday evening, then burnt-out, manage just 40 minutes on Saturday.

Parents should also control the revision environment. If your child prefers to study in their bedroom, then make sure they have a desk and space to keep their materials organised and do your best to keep siblings relatively quiet. Yet other children are more productive on the kitchen table amidst the family din so even if this is not your idea of what is conducive to revision, go with the flow. In addition, smart-phones and headphones have become part of a teenager's life: some work well listening to music and some can still concentrate on academic work through the constant banter of social media. For others technology is an undeniable distraction - but mid-exam season is not a good time to ignite a disruptive family row which may simmer on for days.

If this is the last session of exams your child will ever take - then be thankful. If not use this exam season as a learning experience. Should you have confronted the headphones issue earlier in the year? Should you have discussed and identified potential troubles earlier and discussed the problem with the school? Would some tuition sessions help? If so, facilitate this and get a professional who for an hour at a time, is only thinking about the needs of your child. Tuition for children, both for on-going support with long lead times before public exams, or as a final boost just before school and public exams will help.

In conclusion, examination season is the very time when parents should be using their experience and wisdom to put exams into perspective for their children. As we know so well, a set of examinations is just one hurdle in a long list of life's hurdles and as a letter from the Principal of a school in Singapore recently told parents anxious for their children to do well "please do remember, amongst the students, who will be sitting for the exams, there is an artist, who doesn't need to understand Maths. There's an entrepreneur, who doesn't care about History or English Literature. There's a musician, whose Chemistry marks won't matter."

At the end of the day, a well rounded child who has been helped to do their best and has emerged from exam season intact, still speaking to their parents and ready to embark on the next stage of life's journey, is what we want for all our children.

May 2017