

PARENT NETWORK UPDATE

Teens and Managing Exam Stress

When major tests roll around at school, whether mid-terms and finals or achievement tests and SATS, the stress level at home may start to rise dramatically as students start to deal with the added pressures and expectations. What can parents do to help? How can we guide our teens and be supportive without inadvertently adding to the pressure and anxiety? And what do teens need to know about how to manage their own stress?

TIPS FOR SUPPORTIVE PARENTS...

Be supportive, but not intrusive. Acknowledge that your child may be feeling the pressure and anxiety of extra studying and ask, "What can I do to help?" Then stay out of the way, providing a comfortable space and lots of quiet.

Be flexible and relaxed about chores and other obligations, and allow for the occasional moodiness.

Help your child keep perspective, be realistic and stay positive – reassure your student that it's normal to be nervous, but with proper planning and study, everything will work out as it's supposed to. Focusing on grades or performance expectations will only fuel anxiety.

Encourage healthy habits to keep your teen's body and mind running smoothly. Help facilitate:

- **proper sleep** -- experts recommend 8-10 hours)
- **good hydration and nutrition** -- make sure you have nutritious food on hand and offer herb tea, ice water and whole grains, fruits and vegetable snacks
- **regular breaks from studying** -- periodic down time helps release tension and refresh the mind.
- **exercise** -- a jog or brisk walk around the block calms the mind, keeps the blood flowing, and makes it easier for teens to focus when they go back to work.

TIPS TO SHARE WITH YOUR TEENS...

Get enough sleep – experts recommend 8-10 hours a night. Panicky cramming and all-nighters are counterproductive. Your brain needs the critical down time of sleep to process and retain what it has taken in.

Eat healthfully, snack often and hydrate – your brain needs good nutrition and water to function at its best. Avoid sugar and go for grains, fruits and vegetables that will keep your blood sugar stable.

Avoid substances – anything that can give you a high, whether caffeine, drugs or alcohol, can also give you a low. Try to keep your body on an even keel.

Move -- when studying, take frequent breaks (at least 10 minutes every hour) and stretch. Occasionally

close your eyes and do deep breathing, and/or exercise, even if it's just running in place (though a jog or brisk walk around the block is even better!) This calms the mind, keeps the blood flowing, and makes it easier to focus when you go back to work.

Avoid stressful people – tension and anxiety are contagious, and if you're hanging around with friends who are constantly stressed and fretting about tests, their negativity and panic can rub off. If you like studying in groups, choose your partners wisely.

Make a study plan and stick to it – try to set realistic goals and don't procrastinate. Schedule in periods of study that include regular breaks, and set aside time to do something fun that you can look forward to.

Ask for help if you need it – know that you're not alone, and don't be afraid to ask a teacher, counselor, friend or parent if there's something you simply can't wrap your head around. And don't be afraid to ask parents for the kind of time, space and support you need for study.

Keep perspective and stay positive – study to the best of your ability, then trust that the results will accurately reflect what you know. Be confident and visualize performing at your best.

FIND THE CALM

If you find yourself in a study or testing situation and your brain seems to go blank or freeze up with anxiety, try the following:

- Stop what you're doing.
- Sit up straight and put both feet firmly on the ground.
- Close your eyes.
- Relax your shoulders, arms, hands, jaw.
- Take several deep, cleansing breaths -- deep inhale: long, slow exhale.
- Tell yourself, "Everything is going to be fine."

For a one-page printable Tip Sheet to give to your teen, [click here](#).

CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES...

BHS's three excellent tutorial guides --

[Strategies for Taking Multiple Choice Exams](http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/_strategies_for_taking_multiple.pdf) - http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/_strategies_for_taking_multiple.pdf

[Guide to Essay Questions](http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/guide_to_essay_questions.pdf) - http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/guide_to_essay_questions.pdf

[Guide to Preparing for Mid-Terms](http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/guide_to_preparing_for_midterms.pdf) - http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/guide_to_preparing_for_midterms.pdf

Also, B-PEN's special newsletter on *Teen Stress*

http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/stress_issue.doc

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