

Exams and assessments can be stressful. Whilst some levels of stress can help us to focus and stay motivated, too much stress can hinder exam performance by reducing our ability to retain information and pay attention.

In addition, when the pressure to perform becomes too high, it can have a profoundly

negative impact on our mental health and wellbeing.

That is why we have devised this Exam Stress Toolkit, in collaboration with our National Anti-Bullying Youth Board, to bring advice and tips on how to deal with exam stress.

STATISTICS ABOUT EXAM STRESS:

In 2018-2019, Childline gave

2,795 counselling sessions where young people were worried about exam stress.

[\[NSPCC\]](#)

According to a survey of the National Education Union,

82% of respondents said that tests and exams have the biggest impact on the mental health of pupils.

[\[NEU, 2018\]](#)

In a study completed by Putwain and Daly,

16.4% of the secondary school students in the sample reported themselves to be highly test anxious.

[\[Putwain and Daly, 2014\]](#)

More than

75% of students have experienced stress or anxiety about changes in their exams in 2021 due to COVID-19.

[\[The Standard\]](#)

RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF STRESS

It might be difficult to identify when someone you know is experiencing high levels of stress, especially if they are trying to hide their feelings. Equally, it might be difficult for you to recognise your own stress levels or when you need to reach out for support.

Here are some signs:

- Putting off revision until the last minute or procrastinating.
- Changes in appetite.
- Not sleeping as well as usual or sleeping more than usual.
- Irritability or bursts of anger.
- Becoming withdrawn from friends and family
- Losing interest in the things you usually enjoy.
- Physical pains, like headaches.

TOP TIPS

1. Don't compare yourself to others.

It's hard because we all, naturally, compare ourselves to our peers. Try not to as this will make you more stressed and anxious. – Lydia

Everyone studies in different ways and there is not a one size fits all when it comes to exam preparation. Try not to feel pressure to study for the same number of hours or using the same methods as someone else – it is about identifying strategies that work best for you!

Comparing your results and grades to other people's might also increase the pressure and stress you are experiencing. Therefore, keep in mind that exams are not designed to be a competition – it is more productive to focus on achieving your personal best rather than beating someone else's scores.

2. Remember that you are more than your grades.

Realise that at the end of the day, you can recognise the fact that you worked hard for the exam and a bad grade doesn't necessarily represent that. – Harman

You are so much more than your grades and exams only assess a very small number of your skills and talents. Exam results alone are not an indicator of your hard work, intelligence, skills, or ability to go on to achieve amazing things.

So long as you have tried your best, then you should be proud of yourself regardless of the end grade!

3. It is ok to not revise all the time!

If you are stressed for any exams, don't revise absolutely all the time as that is too much pressure, give yourself an hour or two to spend time with friends and family, doing things you love as that will really help you get through this! – Ruchi

Whilst it is important to put time and effort into revising, it is just as necessary to make time to relax and have fun.

Constant studying may lead to burnout, which is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress ([Bitesize Books Series](#)). Taking regular breaks to do things that you love, such as meeting up with friends, watching a movie, or reading a book, can help prevent burnout and lead to positive mental wellbeing.

4. Listen to your body and prioritise self-care.

Firstly, listen to your body. If you feel tired and just want to sleep, your body is warning you that you're pushing yourself too hard. It's hard to create a balance between great exam results and a good state of body and mind but at the same time, you shouldn't sacrifice parts of yourself for other parts – you just reorganise them. You don't have to sacrifice friendships and phone time but use it to reward you! – Harman

It can be easy to overlook your physical and mental health when experiencing high levels of stress. Yet prioritizing self-care can actually help improve your productivity and performance. For instance, getting at least 8 hours sleep each night can help your body and mind to function effectively. Exercise can also help with both physical and mental wellbeing as can a healthy diet.

5. Organise your time.

Organisation is the biggest tip I could give to dealing with exam stress. If people are organised a good 4 weeks in advance, they can comfortably cover a full topic and be sure they know all the content they need to for exams. The best way to think about exam pressure is like a tower which is built of exams and other commitments in life and the mechanisms are like a demolition team which want to reduce this stress and the goal is to be comfortable or at least less stressed. – Mitch

Planning out your revision timetable can be a great way of alleviating stress. It enables you to break what might seem like an overwhelming amount of work into more manageable chunks. A timetable can also be a great way of ensuring that you plan in time for breaks, self-care activities, and fun!

You could even plan in time at the end of each day to reflect on what you have achieved or are proud of from that day – this will allow you to identify your progress and celebrate your own successes.

We have included a timetable as a suggestion (see page 4) but use whatever system works best for you!

6. Talk about your worries.

I feel that talking to someone takes a big weight of your shoulders, whether that be talking to your peers, your teachers or your family. They will listen and support you through it. There is always someone to talk to, don't think you're alone. – Lydia

Whether it be a family member, teacher, or an Anti-Bullying Ambassador, there is always someone there to listen to your concerns and worries. After all, a problem shared is a problem halved!

We also have [The Diana Award Crisis Messenger Service](#), which is a free, 24/7 confidential support line. All you have to do is to text **DA** to **85258** and a trained volunteer will listen to how you are feeling and help you think of the next steps towards feeling better.

7. And remember you are enough!

The pressure usually comes from yourself and your mind tricking you into thinking that you aren't good enough. You are good enough – you know much more than you think. – Paige

Self-doubt and low self-esteem might contribute to feelings of exam stress. Rather than focus on what you still need to learn, place the emphasis on what you do know or what you have managed to achieve at the end of each day. This will allow you to reflect positively on your own skills, talents, and hard work. Remember that you are always enough and no exams or assessments, regardless of the results, are going to change that fact.

WHAT CAN ANTI-BULLYING AMBASSADORS DO TO HELP DURING EXAM TERM?

1. Be there to listen.

Please, always remember and make sure that you know this, Anti-bullying ambassadors aren't just here to combat anti-bullying, but they are also here to help and guide you through difficult times, such as exam stress or any other stress, sometimes getting something off your chest is the biggest help. – Ruchi

As an Anti-Bullying Ambassador Team, you could organise regular drop-in sessions during exam terms so students know where they can go if they want someone to talk to about their worries and concerns. Alternatively, you might pop into any after school revisions sessions to let students know who you are and how they can ask for support.

If you are concerned about another pupil or spot the signs that they might be experiencing high levels of stress, you should speak to a trusted adult immediately.

2. Share tips and experiences.

Get to know your peers and use techniques suited for them to relax them. Encourage people to find their 'happy place' and help them focus on other things as well. This could be music, arts, reading, or anything that relaxes them. Share your tips and experiences as well so that you can show you care and make your work more personal and effective - Harman

The wealth of experience your Anti-Bullying Ambassador Team has of studying for exams might be really useful to other students – why not share your wisdom? You could create posters, guides, or lists of things that have helped you in the past to share around school. Or maybe you could run an assembly or class discussion dedicated to sharing exam stress tips and advice!

3. Prioritise student wellbeing!

To help peers during exam term, they could just simply reach out to ask if exam students are okay. During that stressful time, many of us forget about our well-being and sometimes it's nice to have a distraction as well as someone to talk to. – Paige

During exam term, why not organise activities that help to boost the wellbeing of students who are taking exams and assessments? For instance, offering kind words of support before and after exams can be really reassuring for students experiencing stress. Your Anti-Bullying Ambassador team could even wish people good luck and hand out fruit or water to those who are about to take an exam.

These kinds of activities could also contribute towards your Anti-Bullying Ambassador team earning the Wellbeing Badge!

Something as small as reaching out and asking how someone is could also make a real difference and demonstrates that you care about the wellbeing of your peers.

4. Mindfulness and self-care

In regards to looking after your well-being, I would suggest mindfulness apps and listening to music. It can often feel that your mind is on overload so taking some time to reflect, ultimately improves your productivity. – Paige

Doing activities that enable you to relax can help to alleviate stress – why not put on mindfulness activities with the rest of your ABA team? For instance, you could organise yoga and meditation at lunch times as a welcome distraction for anyone who is feeling anxious.

OTHER RESOURCES:

DEALING WITH EXAM STRESS

- [Childline: Assessment Stress and Pressure](#)
- [NSPCC: Tips for Teens and Parents/Carers](#)
- [NSPCC: Tips and advice to help reduce exam stress](#)

REVISION SITES AS RECOMMENDED BY THE YOUTH BOARD

- [BBC Bitesize](#)
- [Seneca](#)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
REVISION:							
REVISION:							
3 things I achieved today							
Self-care activity							

We're proud to be the only charity set up in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, and her belief that young people have the power to change the world. It's a big mission but there are two things within it that we focus our charity's efforts on – young people and change.

Throughout all of our programmes and initiatives, 'change' for and by young people is central, including our anti-bullying work which encourages change in attitudes and behaviours.

We hope you found this resource useful and wish you all the best in your anti-bullying journey. If you would like to help us create more resources and train even more Anti-Bullying Ambassadors, you can make a £5 donation by texting CHANGE 5 to 70470 or visit diana-award.org.uk/donate

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