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Experts in Children & Young People's Emotional Well-being

Exam Stress & Emotional Well-being

As the exam period nears ever closer, related stress and anxiety often becomes more prevalent amongst young people. Changes in mood, irritability, difficulty sleeping and a general sense of overwhelm are common themes experienced by students. This naturally leaves parents/carers of a young person experiencing these challenges wondering how they can offer the most effective support during this time.

It can be reassuring to remember that all emotions are ok, and they are not a permanent state of being. Instead, our emotional state shifts and fluctuates in intensity, often influenced by external stressors such as exams.



The brain perceives a potential threat, or in this case, a demand (exams). In order to protect us, the body releases stress hormones and adrenaline to prepare us to respond to the perceived danger and maintain our safety. The build-up of these elements

is what produces the feeling of anxiety.

Little things can help in a big way. Supporting your child in the following ways will aid them to regulate their emotions and reach a place of inner calm.

- Acknowledge and validate emotions. Let your young person know that you have noticed they are struggling with a strong emotion, and it makes sense that they are feeling that way with their

exams on the horizon. This will allow them to feel understood and less alone with their feelings.

- Remind them that rest and sleep contribute towards improved cognitive function. Taking a break is necessary and will positively impact upon their learning/revision.



- A type of deep breathing called box breathing, will help to activate the soothing part of the brain.
 - (1) Inhale for 5 seconds.
 - (2) Hold that breathe for 5 seconds.
 - (3) Exhale for 5 seconds.
 - (4) Allow the lungs to remain empty for 5 seconds before repeating.
 - (5) Repeat this cycle 7-10 times

Practicing this with your young person will allow you to connect with them, alongside being a source of gentle encouragement.

- Support your young person to engage in activities that have a self-soothing component by engaging one of their five senses. For example, having a bubble bath or going for a walk, noticing the sounds/smell around them.
- When in the midst of difficult emotions, you can help your young person to feel calmer by co-regulating with them. Speak in a gentle tone and soften your facial expression. Over time, they will start to mirror your calmness.

Remember, merely being present and warm will create a sense of safety for them and help to alleviate anxiety or any other difficult emotion they may be experiencing.