

GCSE Success and How Parents Can Help

Should I help with revision?

Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter their examination years, confused by the complicated systems of choosing subjects and courses, coursework, entry tiers, exams and practical assessments.

The exam system has changed greatly over the past few years, and is continuing to change, and sometimes it feels as if it is best just to let the 'experts' at your child's school get on with it.

Encouragement and taking an interest can make a huge difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the demands of the exam period.

Parental support and involvement in a child's education can mean the difference between a top grade and a fail at GCSE. You don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects to make a real difference.

Students can find it hard to understand the long-term importance of doing the best they can, and learning to shelve short-term fun for a time in the interest of long-term benefits (not easy for adults either). Children also differ in their levels of maturity, ability to take responsibility for their learning, organisational skills and levels of motivation.

The aim of this booklet is to provide you, the parents, with key points to support the GCSE process. If you have any other questions regarding specific subjects, please contact the school for further information.

What's the best way to revise?

Establish how much time they have available between now and the exams, and then draw up a realistic timetable together. Let your child decide what they need to focus on, this timetable belongs to them.

In working out how much time they should devote to each subject, encourage them to concentrate on their weaknesses without losing sight of their strong points.

Revision timetables are useful and effective tools that can help your child to prepare for exams and achieve the grades they deserve. Winstanley are providing a custom wall chart for this purpose.

	Subject 1	Subject2	Subject3	Subject 4
Mon	Maths/fractions	English	Science	
Tues	French/verbs			Geography

Ideally your child should be aiming to complete around 2.5 hours every evening in the run up to an exam.

They should make a topic or subject tick list. This way they can see what they need to cover revision wise before the exam.

When you have set a revision plan together, what next?

- Encourage and support your child to stick to it! That way you can help them to keep track of how much work they have done and what they have left to cover.
- Also make all of your family members aware of the fact that your child will need some peace and quiet during this time, so they know not to disturb them.
- Switching revision between subjects avoids them becoming bored of a single topic.
- Look for fresh sources of info other than class notes. The internet, for example, offers some innovative learning resources.

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- You can offer small 'rewards' after every revision session. Nothing extravagant, just a small treat to help them to get back to their books.
- Ensure that your child avoids last-minute revision the night before. Instead, support them to complete their revision plan early.
- Ensure your child attends every day if possible. Even one lesson missed means that key information could be missing.

A few words of encouragement you can offer your child

- Ignore what friends and others are doing or saying – you are working for an easy life for YOU now and later – let your friends have the hassle of redoing coursework or even a full GCSE
- Resist the temptation to bury your head in the sand if things are getting out of hand – talk to your someone - parents, tutor or teachers.
- Revision – don't wait until you're in the mood – the further behind you get the less you will be in the mood. Try and stick to your schedule as much as possible.
- Be realistic with your revision timetable. You will be more likely to stick to it.
- Get good revision books as they can do much of the initial work for you by breaking down the subject into chunks.
- It is never too late until you enter the exam room. With revision a little knowledge is better than none at all and could make the difference between a pass and fail.
- Have a clear goal for each revision session. Eg. 'at the end of 1 hour I will be able to label a diagram of a leaf and answer questions about photosynthesis'.
- Have a start and finish time and stick to it.
- STOP and take a break if you are becoming frustrated or overwhelmed. Note anything you are finding hard and take it to your next lesson. Don't struggle alone, ask for help.
- Tell yourself it's not for long and think about the summer holiday.
- The hardest bit is making a start.
- Have a day off, but not in the few weeks before the exams.

What are the common problems students face?

Putting off revision, finding excuses to do other things or leaving all the work to the last minute.

Perhaps the biggest problem surrounding revision and exams is stress. It can make even the most ardent reviser think they can't remember anything, and even lead to panic attacks.

So how should I help my child to deal with exam stress?

- Please don't add to stress levels if your child 'pushes the boundaries'. Battles that don't need winning yet can wait.
- Encourage them not to be frightened of exam stress, but to see it as a positive force - after all, it keeps them on their toes mentally, and can help them focus on the task in hand.
- Learn to recognise when they are stressing out, and understand its causes. Often, a break or a chat with someone who knows the pressure they are under will get things into perspective.
- Make sure that they get a good nights sleep before each exam - it will be much easier for them to concentrate during the exam if they are not feeling too tired.
- Encourage them to eat healthily during their revision and exams: Plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Bananas are brilliant for brains!
- Avoid caffeine, it makes stress worse and it dehydrates their brains.

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Useful equipment

Making sure your child has all the right equipment so they can get ready for their exams is also something you could really help with.

Some things that your child could find very useful during their revision:

Fine-point coloured pens	Highlighters	Watch
Calculator	Pin-board	Post-it notes
Note or record cards	Notebooks	Alarm clock
Access to a computer and printer	Folders and files	Revision guides
Past exam papers		

Revision Strategies

Going through past question papers is very helpful. Your child can familiarise themselves with the format of the paper and the wording of the questions. They may also act as a guide to the types of topic which may crop up in the exam, but your child should not rely on this too much!

They should practise making brief plans to answer the questions. Your child should not need to answer the question in full, but by going through what they know, selecting the most relevant material and ordering it coherently, they are practising a technique which will be used in the exams.

Why students fail to get the marks they hope for:

- Failing to answer the question set.
- Misinterpreting the question, perhaps because they misread the instruction words or specialist terms.
- Not reading the instructions carefully.
- Not writing answers in the way they are required.
- Not referring sufficiently or selectively to the course material.
- Running out of time, so that the final question is not answered in sufficient depth.
- Not checking through the paper carefully to avoid obvious mistakes, such as dates or simple mathematical calculations.
- Writing long, complex sentences where the meaning gets lost.
- Illegible handwriting.

Always remember to remind your child to follow the tips given to them by their teachers – they will give them more tips on how to answer subject specific questions.