

HOW TO COPE WITH EXAM ANXIETY

It's completely natural for your teen to feel anxious about exams and their performance – you might share these worries too! A little anxiety can be beneficial, as it can help your child focus, motivate them to study, and even aid in recalling information they didn't realise they had learned. Recognising Signs of Anxiety and Stress Being aware of the signs of anxiety and stress is important so you can keep an eye on your teen. A brief change in behaviour might not be a cause for concern, but if you notice consistent alterations, it often indicates that something is amiss.

Common signs of anxiety include:

- Loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed
- Changes in behaviour – typically quiet teens may become talkative, while chatty teens may withdraw.
- Increased grumpiness and irritability.
- Frequent headaches and digestive issues (such as stomach aches, diarrhoea, constipation, vomiting, etc). Constant worrying, often focusing on negative outcomes (e.g., "What if I fail?").
- Repeatedly discussing the same concern without finding relief
- Physical symptoms (like sweaty palms, shaking, rapid heartbeat, muscle tension).
- Restlessness and difficulty staying still.
- Trouble concentrating (like following a TV program).
- Experiencing panic attacks.
- Difficulty sleeping.

Remember to maintain perspective. If they've had several late nights, they're likely to feel fatigued, which can lead to increased irritability. Exercise can cause muscle soreness, and if they've just rushed to meet you, a quickened heartbeat is normal. A few of these symptoms, or a temporary combination of them, is typical.



Effective techniques for alleviating anxiety

The second way to assist is by offering an opportunity for them to learn effective techniques that can help alleviate anxiety. It's beneficial for your teenager to practice these methods when they are not feeling anxious, allowing them to become familiar and comfortable with the techniques and the sensations they evoke. This way, if anxiety arises, they will be at ease with the process. Regular practice of relaxation techniques also helps keep anxiety in check.

Here are some effective options:

- Breathing Techniques are powerful tools for managing the physical symptoms of stress. Learning to breathe slowly and deeply can have an immediate calming effect and is especially useful in preventing anxiety from escalating. Practices like meditation, visualisation, and yoga promote positive breathing habits. Additionally, apps like Headspace can be installed on a phone, giving your child access to support anytime, anywhere.
- Engaging in yoga has been shown to enhance heart rate and physical strength. The focus required to achieve the poses helps divert the mind from negative thoughts.
- Meditation transports the mind to a different realm. There are various forms of meditation, including auditory (describing experiences) and visual (focusing on an image).

Breathing exercises, yoga, and meditation can be practised in short or extended sessions, either alone or in groups, making them ideal for integration into daily life or as tools for when anxiety strikes.

