

A MESSAGE TO PARENTS: HOW TO HELP YOUR SON/DAUGHTER TO PREPARE FOR EXAMINATIONS

A Team Effort

Examination success is invariably the result of a team effort with students, teachers and parents all having a crucial part to play. It is a sad fact of life, however, that the parents' role is often unrecognised and always unsung. After all, what self-respecting adolescent is ever going to acknowledge that his/her parents have done something right! But don't be discouraged by this. Parents have an important part to play in supporting students through the demanding and stressful process of preparation for examinations.

The School Focus

Your sons and daughters have a very busy and challenging year ahead of them. They will be sitting some 'mock' examinations in November and their final examinations in May/June of 2019. For most of this term, teachers will be concentrating on covering their subject syllabus; there will not be a great deal of time for working on effective learning and revision skills and good examination techniques. However, after Christmas teachers will place increasing emphasis on developing students' examination skills. Indeed, for the half-term immediately before the GCSE examinations, lessons in most subjects will consist exclusively of a structured revision programme, including plenty of practice at answering GCSE questions.

So how can you help at home?

The most effective type of help is likely to be sensitive, subtle and flexible. Though parents are bound to have high expectations of their children, to communicate these expectations too forcefully is only likely to increase the pressure on your son or daughter. They will not thank you for the extra stress and may even give up altogether in the belief that they can never match your expectations. Try to help your son/daughter in ways that reduce the stress.

- ***A quiet place to work:***

A good place to begin is your son's/daughter's work place. Ideally this should be a tidy, quiet room with a comfortable chair, a fair sized table and a bright table lamp. It should be as free from distractions as possible. Loud music, a booming television and social networking sites open on the computer/tablet/phone are unlikely to aid concentration.

- ***Planning ahead***

You can also contribute to your son's/daughter's success by encouraging him/her to establish effective and healthy working patterns and practices. This is best achieved by forward planning. Learning and revision are long-term processes and cannot be done by trying to cram a large amount of information into just a couple of weeks. Ideally revision should begin 6 to 8 weeks before the examination period. This will enable your son/daughter to spread his/her workload over a period of time and to avoid stress by also having time to relax, keep fit and enjoy life. Balancing all of these things is the key to success.

- ***Producing a revision timetable***

It is, of course, important for students to draw up a revision timetable consisting of times for work, for relaxation, for recreation and for meals. This will help your son/daughter to establish a good routine and to avoid 'drift'. It should demonstrate that there are enough hours in the day to fit everything in, including a social life, if he/she is organised. However, beware of trying to impose your own working patterns on your son/daughter. Different

people learn best at different times and, therefore, need to establish their own routine. Your son/daughter needs to discover what works best for him/her and then to stick to it.

- **Beating stress**

Finally, you need to be on the look out for signs of stress in your son/daughter in the weeks and months ahead. The symptoms of stress are wide-ranging and include depression, low self-esteem, headaches and skin problems, irritability and difficulty sleeping. These are obviously symptoms that can be found in most adolescents for much of the time! It is not always easy to distinguish work-related stress from adolescent angst!

If you detect signs of stress in your son/daughter, it is worth asking the following questions:

- *Is he/she taking plenty of exercise? Fresh air, a good diet, plenty of sleep, and vigorous exercise all support the body and mind in coping with the stress of revision and examinations.*
- *Is he/she taking regular breaks when revising? The optimum time span for revision is about 50 minutes, after that concentration drops off sharply. Students should take a 5 or 10 minute break every 50 minutes and should reward themselves for the work they have already done.*
- *Is he/she building variety into his/her revision programme and beating the boredom factor? However fascinating the topic, if a student spends too long over it he/she will lose interest and become demoralised. Every evening's revision should consist of 3 or 4 different subjects.*
- *Is he/she finding time to enjoy him/herself and take a complete break from work? Revision and examinations do not mean the end of enjoyment and social life. Students should work hard but also play hard. The play will recharge the batteries for the next wave of revision.*

Remember most adolescents will not respond to the heavy handed or autocratic approach. Even well-meant advice from parents often encounters an angry and negative response. Try to persuade your son/daughter that the above advice was all their own idea in the first place. If you succeed, let me know how you did it and I shall pass it on to other parents. Good luck!