GCSEs: What can a parent do? Tips to ensure success

Section 1: Introduction	Page No
• The most common frustrations for parents	2
Number one tip: Get them there	3
 Good exam results – what is the secret? 	4

Section 2: Getting it right at each stage

•	How can I make a difference?	5
•	Isn't it the school's job to get them through the exams?	5
•	So what is your role as a parent*	7
•	Getting it right at each stage	8
٠	When the going gets tough	9
•	Dealing with excuses	10
•	Revision	12

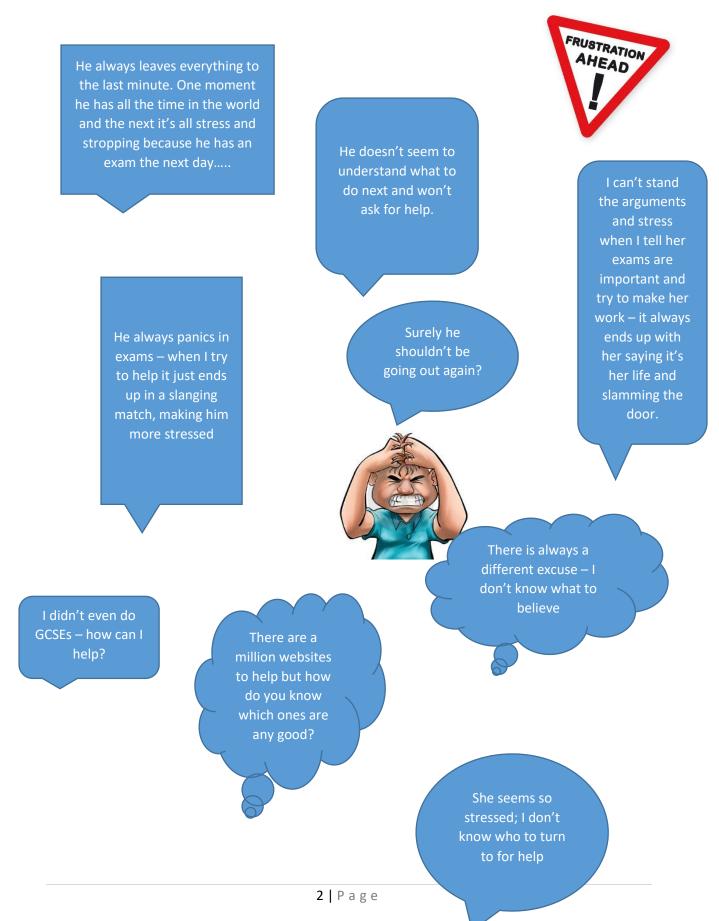
Section 3: Sitting the exams

•	Tips for parents	18
•	Exam challenge – beat the parent	19
•	Tips for students	20
•	When it all goes pear shaped: A trouble shooting guide	22
•	Support Materials	24

*The word 'parent' is used throughout the booklet, but of course you don't have to be a parent to make a difference. Carer, older sibling, grandparent or neighbour – it won't make any difference to the impact you can have.

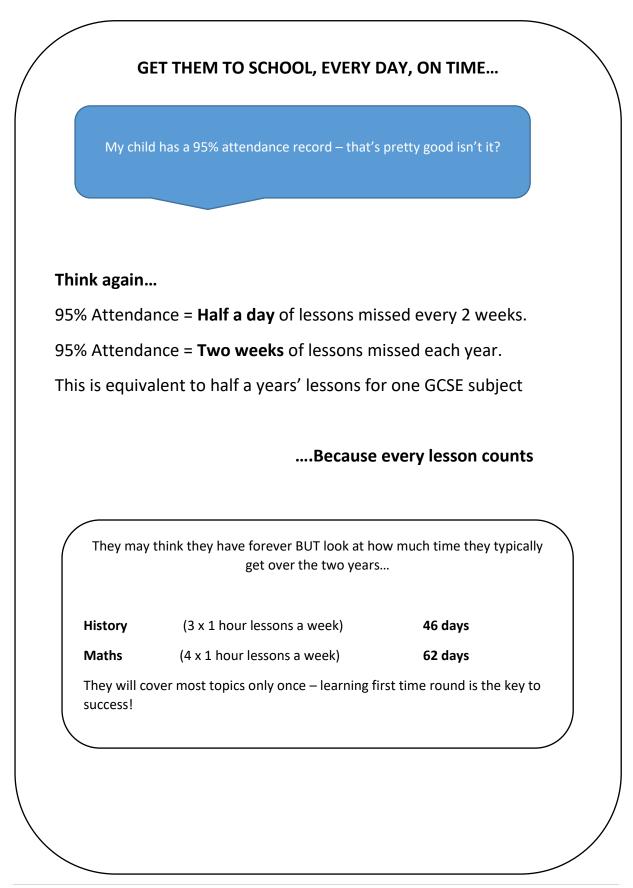
Section 1: Introduction

The most common frustrations for parents



Number 1 Top Tip: Get them there!

The single most effective thing you can do to ensure good GCSE results is this.....



Good exam results – what is the secret?

We tend to think that our children's results come down to how they do on the day of the exam. Will they be in the right frame of mind? Will they be lucky and get the questions they want? Will they remember what they have revised?

In fact, the result of the exams has generally been determined well before the exam itself. There are a number of stages in the process of achieving exam success. The secret to good results in exams is about getting it right at each stage of the process whilst being aware of what can go wrong.

STAGE 1: Learning the content first time round

The process of revision (literally 'looking at something again') does assume that the content of the subject has been learnt in the first place – every lesson counts.

If there is an area within a subject that your child does not understand, then they need to be asking subject staff now.

STAGE 2: Revision

Even the perfect student, who hasn't missed a lesson and has paid attention throughout the exam years, needs to revise to ensure exam success is achieved. For the rest of us, revision is even more important. There are different ways to revise, some of which are more effective than others, and some suit some children better than others. This booklet will offer a way of helping your child plan their revision as well as giving tips on the various techniques available.

STAGE 3: The exam itself

Even with the first two stages successfully carried out, things can still go wrong. There are three sets of skills involved in taking exams – knowing the subject content, organisation, and exam technique. These are dealt with later in the booklet in the section entitled – 'The moment of truth – sitting the exams'.

Section 2: Getting it right at each stage

How can I make a difference?

Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter the examination years, and particularly as it is getting closer to the examination period itself. The exam system has changed greatly over recent years and continues to do so, sometimes it feels as if it is best to leave it to the 'experts' at your child's school to get on with it, but your involvement is crucial – the difference between a grade 3 and a grade 4, between a grade 6 and a grade 7.

Recent research has concluded that parental support is eight times more important in determining a child's academic success than social class.

The good news is that you don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects that your child studies to make a difference, and you don't have to be a 'super-parent', giving up your own life and responsibilities – you just need to know how best to support your child at each stage of the process.

This booklet will enable you to do that with clear, practical information you will need to help your child meet the demands of the exams, in partnership with the school.

Isn't it the schools job to get them through the exams?

Yes, of the course the school has an important role to play and can provide the expertise and resources to help your child acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to do their best in each subject.

There will be many expectations of your child – expectations which for many children, even the most dedicated, find hard to meet. You don't need to know anything about maths, science, English or art to help them with these things – you have been doing it all their lives.

The demands **you** will be able to help with include:

- Being more self-motivated and taking responsibility for their own learning. They need to be asking if they don't understand, and making the correct choices about accessing extra sessions when they are offered. (This requires confidence and can be difficult at a time when friends' opinions hold so much sway).
- **Developing** their ability to overcome frustrations, and strategies for persisting when they are learning material that they find hard.
- Completing more work at home independently.
- **Organising** themselves, revision notes and handouts for each subject and topic.
- **Planning** and carrying out their revision.
- **Perfecting** their exam technique.

Perhaps the hardest thing for students sitting their GCSE exams is that of understanding the long term importance of doing the best they can, and learning to shelve the short term fun at times in the interest of long term benefits (not easy even for adults).

Unfortunately, from a teenager's perspective, interest and effort in education and it's long term benefits often come rather a long way down the priority list and this is where you come in. You are the expert on your own child, your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands that are expected of them.

So what is your role as a parent*

Your role in helping your child to succeed will vary according to their strengths and needs. You will find that in some areas that the booklet covers you will have little to do, whilst other areas will require more support.

Your role may include some of the following:

- **Partner with school and child** going to parents evenings and information events and asking questions to find out how best to help your child at home.
- **Provider of tools for homework and revision** a quiet space, a 'workbox' of pens, post its, flash cards, paper and any other necessities.

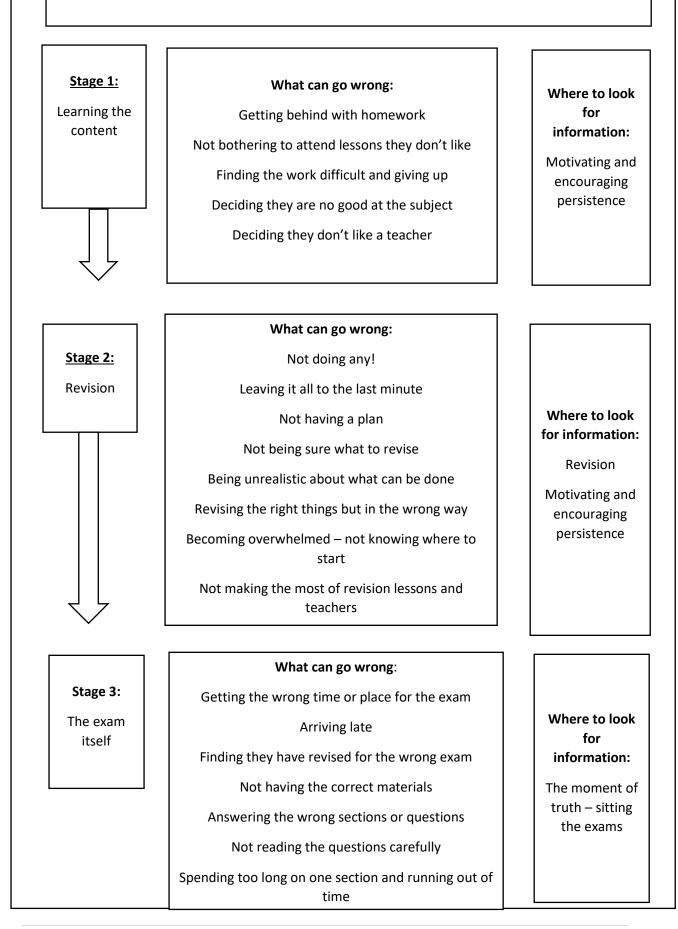


- **Banker** paying for the tools, revision guides, files that they need.
- **Study buddy** showing an interest in the subject, testing them when they ask you, helping with homework where you can, (but not doing it for them).
- **Sounding board** listening to your child's worries and anxieties and offering advice.
- Advisor helping your child to break down tasks so that they are more manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and celebrating achievements. Helping to find a positive way forward when things go badly.
- **Project manager** agreeing the rules for homework or revision, (they won't work if they are imposed), helping make a reasonable timetable, balancing work against 'fun' and revising plans if necessary.
- **Go-between** liaise with your child's Head of Year where necessary; making sure problems are nipped in the bud and asking questions that your child can't or won't.



Whatever your child's needs are, your main role will always be that of the person who cares most in the world, the champion of their needs and admirer of every achievement. The most important role you play is that of the person who will love them and be proud of them whatever happens.

Getting it right at each stage

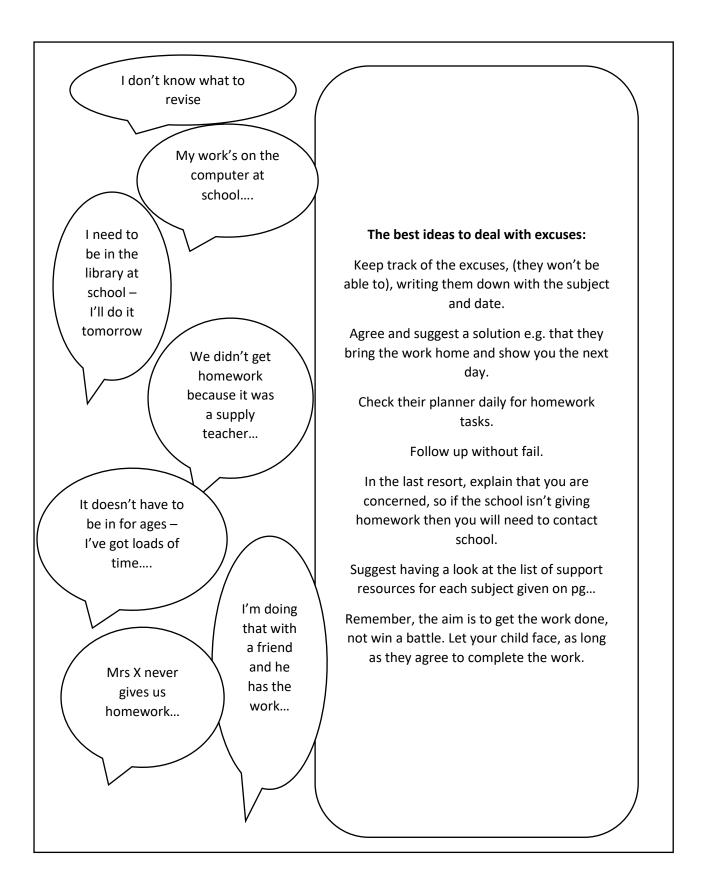


When the going gets tough.....



Maintaining motivation and encouraging persistence

A strategy for dealing with excuses.



Tips for parents:

- Agree the balance between work and social life and stick to it. Flexibility is the key if a special night comes up agree with them when they will make the work time up.
- All students will fall behind, feel de-motivated or overwhelmed or struggle with the balancing social, work and school demands at times. When your child feels like this berating and threatening them will likely have a negative impact. Talk to them, acknowledge their feelings and adopt a sensible attitude towards finding a solution. Help them prioritise and if necessary speak to the school about rescheduling deadlines where possible.
- If your child becomes anxious or withdrawn, encourage them to speak to you or another trusted adult. Let them know that you are there for them and will be proud of them whatever. Talk about successes and try not to damage their self-esteem by talking about behaviour rather than them specifically, (e.g. avoid 'you're lazy', and instead say 'the way you sometimes leave things until the last minute').
- Teenagers will take an all or nothing catastrophic approach to difficulties: 'I've messed up this essay; I may as well give up now – I'll never go to college'. Try to be the voice of reason, how much of your grade is dependent on this essay, let's focus on the next one.

The months before – preparing to study

STUDY ENVIRONMENT

What is required?

- Desk/ or table
- Comfortable chair
- Light
- Ventilation
- Minimum noise or distraction

LEARNING TO RELAX

- Learn to avoid exam anxiety
- Learn to become more relaxed
- Learn to control their breathing
- Learn to relax during the exam
- INSERT LINK TO BREATHING TECHNIQUES

DIET

- Do they need to make any changes to their diet?
- Plenty of water
- Regular healthy meals

The website below contains recipes for healthy meals and also short exercise videos that can be done at home along with some motivational video clips.

Link: https://students.pixl.org.uk PiXL School Number: 103940 Password: Indep179

Revision

Good and bad revision

What is revision? It means literally 're-looking' at information you have learnt previously. The aim is that you know the information that you need for the exam and can remember it.

The aim of revision. The aim of revision is to reduce the amount of information relating to a subject to series of key points, any of which you can then expand on during an exam. The key point, or word or phrase prompts your brain to retrieve the information stored in it. At the end of a revision or study sessions for each topic aim to end up with a card or A4 sheet with the KEY points for that section.

The structure of revision sessions.

- An aim for the session. E.g. 'by the end of this session I will understand and be able to answer questions on photosynthesis'.
- Think about what you already know and identify the bits you need to work on. Try some short tests
- Break down each topic into 'doable' chunks.
- Produce notes of key points, each time you revisit a topic the notes should become shorter.
- Test yourself to see what you have learnt.
- Tick of the topic on an overall revision list so you can see your progress
- Revisit notes briefly after 1 day, 1 week and 1 month. This really works.
- Useful revision involves DOING something with the information you are trying to learn. Different people find different activities useful. Some ideas are:

Revision Techniques

- Drawing spider diagrams on large pieces of paper to show how different parts of a subject hang together.
- Use pictures and colour to make posters with key points. Put these on a wall that is seen regularly.
- Put revision aids ups around the house, especially for any rote learning, ie mathematical formula or English quotes, these can be read while eating breakfast or brushing teeth.
- Record yourself making 10 key points about a topic and then play it back to yourself as you are walking to school, or on the bus into town.
- Highlight key areas of notes or books.
- Listen to podcasts of books or plays and discuss them with another person.
- Use apps and watch relevant video clips, don't do this passively. Pause them and make notes on what you have just seen.
- Read a page, shut the book what can you remember?
- Tell someone about what you have learnt explain how the heart works over a meal.
- Get people around to test you have a family quiz.
- Past exam questions. Use the correct amount of time allocated to each paper.
- **ACRONYMS** using the first letter of each word you need to remember to make a word eg SOHCAHTOA to remember trigonometry.
- **Picture stories** thinking of a strong visual image to associate each word or fact and linking them together in an unlikely and silly story.
- **Mnemonics** making up a silly sentence to help remember the order of something. E.g. Richard of York gave battle in vain to remember the colours of the rainbow.
- Don't break the chain get a calendar and cross off each day that some revision has been done, a little each day from now to the exams will help.

REVIEW – take time occasionally to ask how your revision techniques are working for you. How much have you covered, have you stuck to your timetable? Are you ending up with notes that you can use for last minute revision?



Supporting your child in setting themselves up for revision.

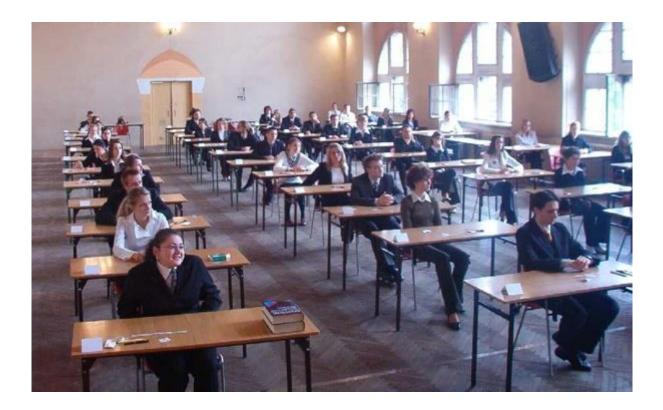
- Talk to your child about how you can support them and what they would find helpful.
- The simplest things often get in the way of starting to revise weeks can be lost of students are 'getting round to sorting it out'. Help them get around to it by making a list of what is needed and providing it. (Pens, post-it notes, flash cards, mini whiteboards, files, paper most of this is provided by school in a pack at the start of year 11).
- Encourage your child to empty their bag and file hand outs and information from lessons every day. It may not seem important, until they need it at which point they are likely to be lost under a mountain of random papers.
- Check emails so that you are aware of what support the school is offering in terms of period 6 classes and holiday revision sessions.
- Support your child by providing a good revision guide for each subject. It's the best investment you can make. (Details of what each subject recommends is on pg....)
- Help your child to plan their revision timetable, this will require an amount of your time but it is worth it, it is the single thing that will make the biggest difference to the effectiveness of revision and therefore the outcome.
- Quietly top up the 'workbox' with pens etc. |Don't get wound up by lost items if you can help it motivation is hard enough to find for revision and arguments about a 50p pen are just not worth it.
- Be flexible if they want to go to a party agree when they will make the time up.
- Provide favourite snacks and plenty of water for revision periods.
- Keep up with regular 'check ins' and don't nag in between times. Show an interest in how the revision is going, talk about any difficulties and help to reschedule their planning as necessary.
- Be sensitive to the pressure your child is feeling let them know that if they really aren't up to it on odd days, it isn't the end of the world. Remind them of all the good work that they have done, and will continue to do. It is the big picture that will count in the end.
- Keep things in perspective your child may not be doing things as you would do them or as often as you would like, but they are doing the best they can in the way that works for them at the stage they are at.

Quick tips for students

- Make yourself start however much you don't want to you have then got over the hardest bit!
- Build in short breaks.
- Do frequent short exercises stretches, neck rolls, walking about etc.
- Drink water and get plenty of fresh air. Keep the temperature cool.
- Eat 'brain food' avoid sugar and have lots of healthy snacks around to eat little and often.
- Take a day off and do something entirely different.
- Don't leave the difficult bits to the end.
- Do something relaxing between revising and bedtime.
- STOP and take a break if you start feeling frustrated, angry, overwhelmed. Make a note of the problem to take to your next lesson, and move on to something else.
- Focus on all the things you have done, not all the things you haven't every little helps.
- Promise yourself little rewards after each session a favourite TV show, reading a book, going out with friends (make sure these are built into your revision timetable).
- At the end of each session file away your notes and clutter so that you have a fresh start for the next session.

SECTION 3

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH......



....SITTING THE EXAMS

Tips for parents

- Try the 'exam challenge' on the next page, then encourage your child to try it too it teaches a valuable lesson in always reading the questions through first!
- The exam period can be very stressful for students. Encourage your child to keep a positive perspective they will soon be on the other side of the exam mountain.
- Try not to add to the stress level in the house by 'rising to the bait' when your child pushes the limits. None of us are at our best when we are under pressure and it is likely that your child's behaviour will be challenging through the exam period. Pick your battles carefully, now is not the time to bring up the issue of an untidy bedroom or the washing up being left again. There will be time to do address these but not now.
- Ensure your child is prepared for the exam and has all the equipment they need for the exams that day. Make sure they have black pens, pencils, calculators and water with them. Remind them that their mobile phones and smart watches are not allowed in the exam with them.
- On exam days, ask them if there is a breakfast study session they should be attending (there usually is), make sure they are up in plenty of time to have a good breakfast. School will provide bananas if they can't eat first thing. Make sure they set off with sufficient time to make it to the exam. If they are late by a few minutes they will have to walk into a hall full of people, adding to the stress.
- Before the exam, remind them that you love them whatever happens. Remind them of any strategies they have for keeping calm, and wish them good luck.
- After an exam, ask how it went but don't insist on a post mortem. If it has gone badly try to adopt an attitude of 'tomorrow is another day'.

EXAM CHALLEN	IGE – BEAT THE PARENT			
Do our brains work more slowly as we get older?				
Take this general knowledge timed test afte	er your parent has completed it to find out.			
	<u>RESULTS</u>			
Adult time:	Student time:			
Please read through all the questions be	efore beginning this general knowledge timed test.			
 Next to number 1, write the capital Next to number 2, write the answer Next to number 3, write the past te Next to number 4, write down 4 sta Next to number 5, write down the communication 	he second line down. column on the left hand side of the page. of France. r to the sum 321 – 67. ense of the verb 'to walk'. ates of the USA. colours of the rainbow in order. names of the planets, in order of closeness to the sun.			
Thank you for	taking time to complete this test			
19	Page			

TIPS FOR STUDENTS

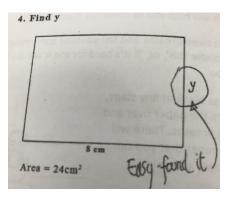
Before the exam

- Know your exam timetable.
- Know when and where you need to be each day, (including your seat number), and plan to get there early leave plenty of time for any last minute crises.
- Allow time for your brain to wake up have a shower or a bath and eat breakfast.
- Before the exam, check the exact subjects you will be asked about, and be familiar with the structure and marking system of the exam (e.g. how many questions from each section are you required to answer).
- Make sure you have EVERYTHING you need, including spare pens and pencils and your calculator.
- Silly as it sounds make sure you have a COMORTABLE PEN to write with, some of the exams are over two hours long.
- Keep anxieties at bay by repeating to yourself 'it will be fine', 'it will all be over tomorrow by 3pm', 'Nobody's going to die' or whatever works for you. If you have worrying thoughts tell yourself to STOP, and try to think of something positive or unrelated to the exam for a while. Breather deeply five times, taking your time over the exhale – this relaxes your body and your mind.
- Visit the toilet before the exam even if you don't think you need to go there is nothing worse, or more distracting, than needing to go during the exam.
- Take water into the exam and sip it throughout your retention and concentration will be up to 70% better if you are well hydrated.
- Don't panic if you can't remember anything at all before you go into the exam. You have revised and when you see the questions the information will comeback.

During the exam

- Remember that it is normal to feel nervous this gives your brain extra adrenalin which will help you make the final effort.
- Take one or two deep breathes and tell yourself something positive such as, 'I can handle this' or, 'if it is hard for me it will be hard for other people as well'.
- If your mind goes blank don't panic turn the paper over and take three deep breathes. There will be some of the paper you can do, reread it slowly and calmly.
- Remind yourself of the exam structure, read the instructions on the front to calm your nerves. Don't pick up your pen until you have done this.
- If appropriate, mark the questions you think you are going to answer then check the instructions to make sure you have the correct number of questions for each section.
- If appropriate, spend 5 minutes at the start of the exam writing down any formula, facts or quotes that you think you will need so that you won't forget them or leave them out.
- Keep to a time frame for each question. If you only have 3 minutes left and still have a question to answer, do it in note form, you may still pick up some marks.
- Work on the questions you feel confident about first. Remember they do not need to be done in a particular order.
- Allow a few minutes at the end of the exam to check through your work and make any changes. (Don't waste your time with your head on the desk).

And don't make this mistake



When it all goes pear shaped: A troubleshooting guide

'I can't cope – there's too much to do!'

Encourage your child to talk about the problems honestly. You will not accomplish this by sighing and saying 'I told you this would happen if it left it until the last minute', (not easy I know but try to bite that tongue). Instead, accept how things are and try to find a workable solution.

'I've left it too late to revise'

One of the biggest mistakes students make is not allowing enough time for revision. This usually results, when they do realise what is involved, in de-motivation and the attitude that there is no point in doing anything as it is not worth it. The key point to remember is that it is never too late until you have entered the exam room – with revision, a little knowledge is better than none.

Put in place a damage limitation plan. Help your child to prioritise and structure revision tasks into manageable chunks. Get them to focus on the subjects they are likely to pass, and, rather than looking at the whole course, identify a few key areas that they can revise as thoroughly as possible in the time they have.

Dealing with stress

A degree of stress is normal and actually is beneficial for successfully tackling exams. If you feel that your child is getting too stressed then you can encourage them to talk to you or another trusted adult. Often what is needed is a sympathetic ear.

Some of the symptoms of stress are listed below. However, you know your own child best so any marked changes in behaviour are worth checking out.

- Difficulty getting to sleep or waking up
- Tiredness
- Poor appetite
- Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
- Headaches and other unexplained aches and pains
- Irritability and frequent angry episodes

If your child is stressed, try to encourage them to take time out from work, doing something they enjoy. Try to encourage exercise as this releases hormones that actively counter stress. Ensure they eat well, and let them know you are always there.

Some strategies on how to help your child regain a sense of perspective are listed below:

• Asking them 'what is the worst that can happen?', or saying 'OK, well the starting point is that nobody is going to die'.

- Reminding them of when they have overcome difficulties in the past.
- Getting them to focus on what they have achieved, despite this 'blip'.
- Pointing out that little is achieved without hard work and mistakes being made it's part of life and learning, adults frequently make mistakes.

General Support Teenagers:

www.childline.org.uk

for tips and advice on exam stress as well as lots of other advice and support.

www.bbc.co.uk

Choose 'More' and go to 'Full 'A-Z' then click on 'Teen Advice'

General support – parents:

www.familylives.org.uk

SUPPORT MATERIALS

General revision tools

Scribble resources, available through the school gateway.

To see samples of what is available go to

https://scribbleresources.com/products/index

Blank revision timetables

https://getrevising.co.uk/planner

English Literature

AQA Literature assessment resources (Sample papers, mark schemes, exemplar responses) https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/gcse/english-literature-8702/assessmentresources

CGP revision guides (available through the school gateway) An Inspector Calls Macbeth Jekyll and Hyde Poetry of Power and Conflict Unseen Poetry

Also York Notes, Collins Snap, Letts revision guides are available to purchase from Amazon Key quotations booklets (*An Inspector Calls, Macbeth, Jekyll and Hyde*) provided by English teachers

Websites: BBC GCSE Bitesize Mr Bruff support videos for all set texts available on YouTube *An Inspector Calls* - ClickRevision available on YouTube *Macbeth* - Spark Notes for translation of key scenes into modern English, scene summaries, quizzes, exemplar responses <u>https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/macbeth/</u>

English Language

AQA Language assessment resources (Sample papers, mark schemes, exemplar responses) ht<u>tps://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/gcse/english-language-8700/assessment-</u> resources

CGP revision guide (available through the school) for preparing for GCSE English Language

Websites: BBC GCSE Bitesize https://www.bbc.com/education/examspecs/zcbchv4

Mr Bruff English Language support videos, available on YouTube.

Maths

CPG Maths (Grade 1-9) workbook, revision guides, exam practice

https://hegartymaths.com/

https://www.mymaths.co.uk/

https://www.mathsgenie.co.uk/gcse.html

https://www.onmaths.com/

http://www.mrbartonmaths.com/index.html

Geography

Paper 1 and 2

For Geography we recommend the Collins Aqa Geography guide and sell them in the department for £5 each.

We also recommend that students use bitesize.

All students are provided with glossaries and knowledge organisers for all topics, these should be used either alone or alongside online resources.

Paper 3

Students will be provided with a copy of the exam pre-release booklet when issues in March/April.

Students will also receive a fieldwork overview sheet to help them learn and remember what they did on fieldwork.

There are other useful websites out there. Here are two others we recommend.

<u>https://ees.as.uky.edu/educational-materials</u> - For tectonic, river and coastal animations <u>https://www.s-cool.co.uk/gcse/geography</u> - Some useful links but use with the specification as not everything on this site is on the exam.

Core RE

For core RE students can access past papers and sample assessments on the exam board website- <u>https://www.eduqas.co.uk/qualifications/religious-studies/gcse/</u>

All students who sit the core RE exam are given revision guides that I produce for every topic studied across the two years.

There is also a text book that we use in school 'Wjec Eduqas GCSE (9-1) Religious studies Route A'. I would not say parents/students need to buy this but it is obviously an option if they so wish.

French

Memrise- online resource all chapters Listening test booklet- teacher produced-all chapters Role play booklets- teacher produced Photocard booklets- teacher produced Speaking test booklets- student answers Vocabulary lists-Kerboodle text book online version Higher text book (from PWA) French revision guides (from PWA) French revision workbook (digital version) Extension booklets

Computer Science

GCSE Revision: <u>http://www.teach-ict.com/2016/GCSE_Computing/OCR_J276/OCR_J276_home.html</u> <u>YouTube CS Tutor:</u> Paper 1: <u>https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL04uZ7242_M60Z2F8qV7sId99cuwV_Z3T</u> Paper 2: <u>https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL04uZ7242_M5KsKU1axzQ20dl4ZvYHPZn</u> Exam Board Website: <u>https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/computer-science-j276-from-2016/</u>