It will come as no surprise that exams can be a particularly stressful time of year for all involved, whether you are a student, parent or teacher. We all want to help our children/students as much as humanly possible and this can sometimes create even more tension. Added to this, children often put pressure upon themselves to achieve in a way that we, as their parents, do not intend. The big question is how do we, as parents, help our children through this challenging time and impart to them some skills and strategies to cope with other, similar experiences as they move through life.

There are a variety of different method for managing stress and many are very effective so how do we choose which ones to try? Every person learns and copes with stress in different ways, so we simply need to give a variety of things a try, and try them a few times before moving to a different strategy.

Research has shown that it is essential for your body to be prepared both physically and emotionally in order to cope with intense stress. Therefore, make sure your child is getting enough sleep and eating a good diet. Check they are keeping hydrated, remember water is the best thing for your child as hydration drinks often contain high levels of sugar which make concentration difficult. Send your child out for regular study breaks during which they plan to relax and have fun. Try to steer them away from computer games or reading novels but rather light exercise to meet a friend and get some fresh air. A fresh brain will have better memory recall and will be able to retain knowledge easier.

Encourage your child to 'Think Positively'. This may sound silly but self-doubt and negative thoughts and discussions can impact heavily on a students' ability to focus and concentrate during study periods. This means the information they commit to their memory can be fragmented and not easily recalled. Focus on thoughts and statements like "I have studied hard and I can do this!", "I am prepared for this exam!". Remind your child that it doesn't matter if there are students who finish before them. They need to take as much time as they need and ignore all students around them. Research has shown that students who leave exams early often don't achieve as well as those who take the full time and read everything carefully.

Remind your child to read the exam very carefully and this will give them a chance to allocate the time required to each question and ensure they don't run out of time. It will also get their subconscious brain working on the answers in the background while they are answering their first questions. A good example of this was a secondary teacher who gave her students a practise exam to sit, she gave them two hours to complete the exam and reminded them all to read it carefully. Many students did not follow this final instruction and spent the full two hours struggling through the exam only to read the very last question which said, "Do not answer any questions. Leave this exam as soon as you read this task." Only two students read this and left in the first 10 minutes. It was a hard lesson learnt for the class but a good one.

Encourage them to note down ideas or cues as they read and use sticky notes or scrap paper to keep track of these. Remind them to underline the key words in the questions so that they know exactly what each question is asking of them. Suggest they start with the easiest questions first where possible. Then return to the ones they aren't sure of after. And lastly, remind them to listen closely to the instructions at the

beginning, this way they are fully aware of all expectations during the exam. Ensure they also read the written instructions on the exam paper.

As long as your child has studied and practised, they can be confident they have done the best they can. This is the key to success, knowing their material. It won't be exciting or the most fun they have ever had but it is only for a few weeks and it will make all the difference for their results.

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