

How to Manage Study & Exam Preparation

The role of the parent during exams and school assessments is to be a benign presence, a giant psychological safety net, ready and able to be there to offer support when needed, especially around maintaining wellbeing.

It is often stated that when a young person is completing senior years of schooling, everyone in the family is doing Year 10, 11 or 12.

Andrew Fuller (Adolescent Psychologist) states that parents have a vital role in helping their teenagers:

- Manage time;
- Manage energy;
- Manage stress;
- Managing to get everything in at the right time and in the right place.

In addition he makes a very valid point that parents/careproviders also need to manage *themselves*.

Parents need to be involved with their teenager but at the same time to be very aware of times when their involvement might not be accepted.

It comes of no surprise that regular planned times for study and preparation throughout the year creates better results. In Andrew Fuller's words "short regular sprints of learning are more effective than long study marathons".

Constructing a Schedule:

A negotiated schedule is not only beneficial but can also be bonding for those involved.

Factors to consider in a Study Schedule:

1. Balance – making sure that there are ample opportunities to play sport, pursue artistic activities (drama, art) and spending time with family and friends;
2. Routine – smart study habits need to be practised regularly and do not develop automatically;
3. Study friendly home-environment – helps to eliminate distractions and provide conditions that help concentration;
4. Scheduled study time – mapping out an ideal week:
 - a. Times for sleeping (at least eight hours a night);
 - b. Times for unwinding and relaxing;
 - c. The best times for study;
 - d. The best time of the week for consolidating notes and extending memory;
 - e. Time to catch up with friends;
 - f. Required school hours; and
 - g. Time for part-time work (less than 10 hours a week).

Study sessions should never be longer than 50 minutes, with a 10 minute break between study sessions.

It is often good to talk with your teenager about such things as how to handle invitations around exam times, any family commitments that are expected and how often you should remind them of the schedule when they don't seem to be following it.

Important Points to Remember:

'Beyond Blue' offer the following Do's and Don'ts for parents

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide, support and encourage ● Encourage healthy eating, regular exercise and plenty of sleep ● Take your teenager's efforts seriously ● Create an effective work space in the house if your teenager can't study in their room ● Take a whole family approach to support ● Give positive feedback whenever possible ● Encourage study breaks when necessary ● Keep an eye on their emotional health – look for changes in sleeping or eating habits, and see your GP if you are worried ● Let them know that you're there when they need you ● Encourage your teenager to believe in themselves, find out what study techniques work best for them, and make sure they ask for help if they need it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nag ● Overload your teenager with domestic chores ● Tell your teenager to work harder or they will fail ● Part Time Employment – Keep this realistic and might need compromise ● Family Celebrations – Understand that your teenager may not be able to partake in all celebrations

Managing Exam Stress

Along with the Study Schedule there are some simple ways to help your teenager manage the stress of their exams. A little stress can be a good thing but feelings of losing control and being overwhelmed are detrimental.

1. Good Nutrition. Eating enough protein can help with learning, memory and mood, and retaining information for the long term. The brain also needs energy and nutrients to repair and maintain brain cells. *Complex carbohydrates* – found in wholegrain cereals, breads and pastas, and in fruits and vegetables – are absorbed slowly in the bloodstream, which means energy is released and is available over a long period. Complex carbohydrates keep teenagers more alert and able to concentrate better for longer. The best drink for the brain is water. Avoid 'traditional' study foods like energy drinks, highly processed foods, chips and lollies.
2. Exercise can be energizing and refreshing. Encouragement to exercise regularly is vital to keep young people alert and focused.
3. Rest and relaxation gives muscles a break and relaxes the brain and aids concentration. Different relaxation techniques include:
 - a. Mindfulness
 - b. Visualization
 - c. Breathing
 - d. Muscle relaxation
4. Importance of Sleep. Regularly not getting enough sleep leads to chronic sleep deprivation. This can have dramatic effects on a young person's life, impacting their mental wellbeing, increasing their risk of depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. It can also affect academic

performance. Sleep research suggests that a young person needs between 8 and 10 hours of sleep every night.

5. Use of a 'study buddy' or setting up a study group. This can help with motivation and engagement.

When the Wheels get Squeaky

It is hard to get through senior high school without some meltdowns. When a meltdown occurs, rather than starting a long conversation about it or providing a motivational pep talk, think about what your teenager needs. Food? Rest? Exercise? Some social time? Try to quietly arrange this to occur.

- How to deal with catastrophic thinking: Pacifying or reassuring the unsettled teenager is a fine art. Acknowledge to yourself in advance that anything you are likely to say is probably going to be heard as the 'wrong thing'.
- What to do when the study schedule breaks down: When planning the schedule, develop a rule of 'never miss twice'. We know there are days when even the most well thought through system falls into tatters. Accept this but also plan never to miss twice. For example, I can take a complete break from study routine for one day but not for two days in a row. If this occurs it is time to re-negotiate and possibly compromise.
- What if my teenager won't listen to me? Have a confidential chat with one of their key teachers so that they can have a conversation with them directly about their progress and study strategies.

Where to get Help

Websites:

- ReachOut
- Youth Central
- Headspace
- Youth and Well
- Youthbeyondblue
- Melbourne Child Psychology: VCE/Educational Coaching (Phone: 8691 1911)

Computer Programs:

- Focusme
- Cold Turkey

Online Studying and Learning Resources:

These university websites have good resources on learning skills, studying and writing exams:

- http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills_old/study
- www.monash.edu.au/lis/lonlone/study.index.xml
- www.lc.unsw.edu.au/olib.html#2
- www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/selfhelp/leaflets.exams

The Cambridge University site is particularly good, especially on preparing for exams.

JMSS:

- Mentor Teacher
- House Leader
- Wellbeing Team