



Monitoring and maintaining good mental health is key to exam success, especially when there is so much information to digest in a compact amount of time. Every child will feel apprehensive about their GCSEs because this is a major milestone in their school career, however there are many ways as a parent you can aid them. In this chapter, we'll outline several ways that your child can improve their mental health and avoid stress. These methods fall into two main categories: short term and foundation techniques. Everyone is different and therefore not all techniques will work for your child. Try a variety and at least one should suit them.

Short Term Techniques

Breathing techniques

Many people do not experience serious mental health issues just due to exams but often these techniques can relieve even the most minute stress. There are multiple ways to stop stress or panic attacks before they take control. The fastest and easiest way to do this is to use one or multiple of these breathing techniques to reduce your heart rate and clear your mind.

1. **7/11 breathing** is the first and most popular technique that counsellors recommend to tackle anxiety. To use this technique, you should focus on your breathing and simply breathe in for 7 seconds then breathe out for 11 seconds. This will distract your mind, make sure that your heart rate slows back to your normal b.p.m. (beats per minute) and ensure your breathing is not too shallow which prevents hyperventilation. It is well known for being a technique which calms the mind.
2. **Box breathing** is another technique that you can use at any time to keep yourself calm. This technique involves making your breathing increments equal to cause the same effect as 7/11 breathing, just with less breath. The recommended method is using 4 counts so you would breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, hold for 4 and repeat in that cycle. A cycle is a great way to keep calm and if you are concerned about your child feeling stressed during the exam this short technique can help calm and re-centre them. A cycle structure can be repeated as few or as many times as your child wants.
3. **Nadi Shodhana Pranayama breathing** is a form of yoga breathing that focuses on breath control and lowering blood pressure. This technique slows your breathing and studies have shown that, if this technique is used every day, over time it reduces high blood pressure and increases mental focus. To do this technique, cover your right nostril and breathe in through the left, then cover the left nostril and breathe out through the right, then keep the left covered and breathe in and then cover the right and breathe out of the left. Repeat this cycle until you feel calm and your heart rate

has reduced. We recommend practicing this technique over time as it can be one of the most effective.

Miscellaneous Techniques

These are other miscellaneous techniques that do not fall into a specific category, but will still help your child; they can use them quickly to help with stress relief. They are good at offering variety and benefit the motivation of your child.

1. **Listening to music** will help relax your child and can help improve their mood. It is generally accepted that listening to music can help improve energy levels. The genre of the music does not matter of course, but classical music can be listened to if your child wants to improve focus or relax. Many apps nowadays have 'chillout' playlists consisting of different genres and some even have 'revision' or 'concentration' playlists. When doing revision at school it is easy to be distracted by friends so this can help keep your child in the revision zone. If they don't own a pair already, you can buy your child some headphones that they can use when revising. Noise-cancelling headphones aren't essential, but are the most effective to avoid distractions.
2. **Use positive affirmations** to help keep your child motivated and improve their mental health. These will make your child feel more stable and secure in their abilities and also allow them to work harder as this will improve their determination and work ethic also.



Foundation Techniques

There are different suggested ways to combat stress relief, but in this section, we'll outline some longer-term techniques that your child can use days or weeks before their exams. These techniques can all easily be incorporated into your child's daily routine and make progressive and larger changes to their overall mental health. Being long-term techniques, they require practice therefore you can guide your child through some of these prior to the exam period if you would like to.

1. **Guided Meditation** is a great way to calm the mind. The majority of these routines are short so they can be used during breaks, revision or at night time so that your child can get to sleep more easily. These breaks for the mind are essential, especially at night as a lack of sleep can cause inefficient revision and poor mental health. There are many apps and CDs that are easy to access and are relatively cheap to obtain.
2. **Emotion Journals** are a great way to identify problems and adjust your child's routine accordingly. These are easy to create as you can use any notebook, or there are apps that your child can use to fill out how they are feeling emotionally. This is good to use so that your child can monitor how they are feeling day to day and they can note what makes them feel more or less stressed or unhappy. Using this information, you can help them to find ways to improve their routine so that your child feels less stressed and better mentally. It's a great way to come up with solutions to problems while at the same time interacting and working in tandem with your child.

3. **Going to see a counsellor** can help you and your child to digest and explore your feelings in a positive way. There is no problem and there should be no shame in going to see a counsellor. This can be a very useful way to seek professional advice in detail about more techniques and lifestyle changes that you and your child can do to help improve their mental health.

If you apply and experiment with these methods you should be able to find the right techniques to use so that you can improve your child's mental health. This process can be taxing on your child's mental health but these techniques can be used to make your child's exam experience easier.

