

COPING WITH EXAM STRESS



We know that exams and assessment periods can often feel overwhelming and lead to feelings of stress and anxiety. We hope the tips in this leaflet help you develop some useful strategies to make you feel more in control of your anxiety as your assessment period approaches.

The first thing to remember is that feeling anxious about things that feel really important to us is a very normal response to situations like exams. The way we feel when we are stressed or anxious about something is really a survival instinct – it tells us something scary may be happening, and prepares us to either run away or fight against whatever is threatening us. That's why we often feel our heart beating faster, butterflies in the tummy, or sweaty palms – our body is preparing to protect us!



Of course, many of the things that cause us stress in modern life – like exams – are not things we can avoid or fight head on! Instead, we need to find ways of managing these feelings so that we can continue to function normally. You have probably all experienced that feeling of exhaustion that comes from being stressed for a long time – this is what eventually leads us to getting headaches, colds and worse – as our bodies simply get exhausted.

The good news is that, whilst we can't avoid exams and assessments, we can develop some useful strategies to help us stay healthy and more in control of our worries...read about some of these strategies in this leaflet and think about which ones may work for you!

CREATING YOUR OWN COPING TOOLKIT!



1

TAKING TIME OUT

Taking time out in the middle of revision and exam prep – even for five minutes – may often feel like an impossible task, or one which you may feel guilty about. We know, however, that doing something as simple as taking a “breather” for a few minutes a couple of times a day can help you feel calmer and stronger. Have a cup of tea, sit in the garden, go for walk - take a little break doing nothing! Jot down some of things you are going to try and which ones you have found helpful

2

MINDFULNESS AND RELAXATION

Download and try some simple mindfulness or body relaxation exercises. You will be surprised how focusing on these exercises for just a few minutes when you start to feel anxious can really help calm your body and mind. Why not try it with friends or family, too!



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Worrying about exams and assessments can be like a habit. But like any other habit, it can be prevented by putting something in its way or by doing things that help you control those worries at certain times of the day or night. Here are some simple distraction strategies that may work for you:

3

CONTROLLING YOUR THOUGHTS

Think of your favourite place – remember the sights, the smells, the sounds

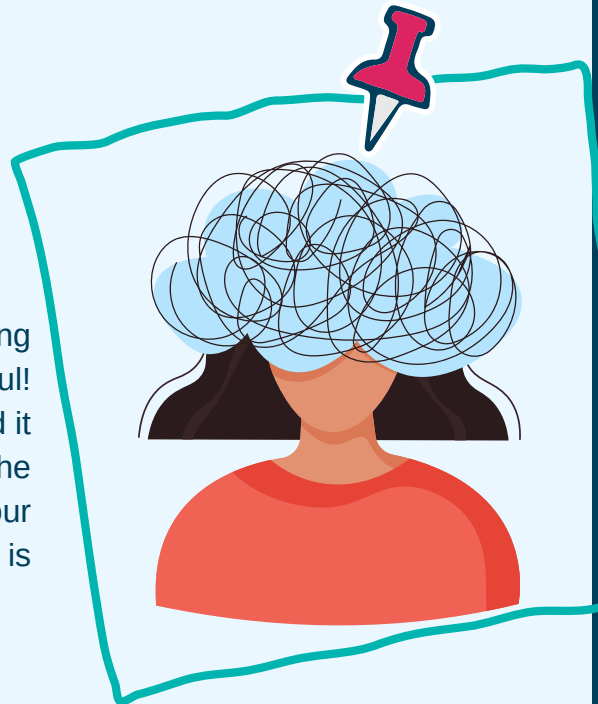
Do something fun or interesting and really absorb yourself in it

At night, count backwards from 50 or remember the lyrics to your favourite song!

4

GETTING THINGS OUT OF YOUR HEAD

Although it may feel like the last thing you want to do, writing about the things that are worrying you can be really helpful! You don't have to share these with anyone, or you may find it helpful to talk to your teachers, friends or parents about the things you have written about. Have a go writing about your worries in the box below and see how it makes you feel...it is up to you whether you share them or not



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5

THINKING POSITIVELY

Although being told to “be positive” can often feel like unwanted advice, in fact we know that positive emotions are really important in helping us manage our ongoing feelings of stress and anxiety. Try and re-frame one or more of your worries from the box above into a more positive statement – sometimes challenging the way we think about things, or looking for the positives – however small – in a stressful situation can actually help us feel better.

WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP

Everyone responds differently to stressful situations like exams. What is important is that you find techniques that work for you, and hopefully some of the advice in this leaflet may help. Importantly, if you find that your feelings of stress and anxiety are becoming overwhelming most of the time, it is really important that you talk to someone about how you feel. Talk to your parents or your teachers who will be able to guide you to further support – don’t keep it all bottled up!



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