

## **How can I help my child deal with exam stress?**

### **The ROSE rule**

Some children sail through exams with very little stress. In fact, some parents wish their children would get more stressed about exams! For others even small tests cause real anxiety.

There are lots of ways to help your child deal with exam stress, from practical things like providing healthy food and helping him to getting organised, to actually supporting your child with revision.

This simple rule covers the four things your child will need to do during exam time

Revise and recap  
Organise time and work  
Sleep and rest  
Eat healthily

### **Revising**

- Revision needs to be active: reading through notes will not make them stick in your child's memory. Encourage him to make notes, to highlight key points and words and to go over each topic several times.
- At the end of each topic, suggest he makes a short list of the main points. These will be useful for a quick revision session the night before each exam.
- There are plenty of websites which offer revision games and activities as well as practice papers with mark schemes. Using a variety of techniques will help all the information to sink in.
- Praise your child when they are working hard. Small rewards can be a real incentive to work, too.

### **Getting organised**

- Work out a revision timetable together early on so that your child allows enough time to cover all the topics he needs to revise. Ticking off each topic as it's done can help revision seem more manageable.
- Make sure your child is setting realistic targets. Trying to cram in too much creates stress and prevents learning.
- On a calendar, mark exam dates and get a thick pen to cross off exam days once they're over. This will help you both feel that there is an end in sight!
- Help your child to organise his clothes, food and pens the night before each exam. Feeling organised about the little things will help to cut down on stress.

## **Sleep and rest**

- Encourage your child to get plenty of sleep and to take regular breaks while he's revising. The brain will work better if it's rested.
- Trying to cram in last-minute revision the night before an exam is generally a bad idea. It will make your child panic and might even affect his performance the following day. It's much better to have a relaxing evening the night before each exam so he can do his best the following day.
- Exercise, even a walk to the shops, will help your child to concentrate when he gets back to work. It can also help him to sleep better.
- Discourage your child from drinking caffeine-rich drinks like tea, coffee and cola in the evening as caffeine can disturb sleep.
- Make sure an alarm is set for the next morning! Waking up in a panic or even arriving late for an exam only makes things more stressful.

## **Eating**

- It's important to eat a healthy, balanced diet all the time, but during exam times this is vital. Eating well will help your child to focus and do his best. Try to discourage your child from eating lots of sugary snacks, as these can actually stop him from concentrating.
- If the school allows children to take a drink into the exam, do make sure your child does so. It will help him to stay alert. This is especially true during the long exams your child will sit as he gets older.
- Exam stress can make some children lose their appetites. If this happens, encourage your child to eat light meals or sandwiches.

## **Revision 'dos and don'ts'**

### **Do**

- Ask your child what areas/subjects he wants help with.
- Make your child feel you're there for him physically and emotionally.
- Organise some 'non-study' activities for him.
- Encourage your child with praise and rewards.
- Make your child's environment revision-friendly.

### **Don't**

- Force your child to revise in a way you think best.
- Put any extra pressure on him.
- Keep telling your child how much better organised you were about revision when you were that age!

### **Revision techniques**

Your child's teachers will recommend techniques for revising particular subjects and topics. There are also some general techniques which you can suggest or even try out together.

### **Repetition**

It may be boring, but when revising your child will need to go over each topic several times to make sure he's learnt it properly. One helpful trick is to go back over a topic briefly the day after studying it in detail. Then, at the end of the week, encourage him to recap everything that's been covered.

### **Active learning**

Learning is always that much stronger if it is an active process. Encourage your child to write notes and use diagrams to remember things. At the end of a topic it's important for your child to summarise everything he has just learnt. This will reassure him that the information has gone in and will also act as a quick recap before he starts the next section.

### **Associations**

It is sometimes easier to remember things if we can make associations with things that we have an interest in. For example, a child who loves drawing could turn the plot of an English Literature text into a cartoon, whilst someone who is keen on music could set some key vocabulary to the tune of a favourite song.

## **Learning outside the textbook**

Learning through textbooks is important, but extra material can be just as valuable. Books, films, visits and information from the internet can all be used to reinforce learning. Look out for television programmes or videos linked to topics or books your child is studying at school. A visit to a museum or exhibition can bring a subject to life, too. Encourage your child to use revision websites.

## **Word games**

There are various ways of remembering information by using words, phrases or abbreviations. Mnemonics often work well. These turn the first letters of the words to be remembered into a name or word.

Here's an example. This mnemonic uses the word PARENTS to help you remember the revision techniques suggested in this article:

**P**ractise  
**A**ctive  
**R**epetition  
**E**ncourage  
**N**otes  
**T**ime management  
**S**tress management

## **Developing your child's Self-Esteem**

Healthy self-esteem is a child's armor against the challenges of the world. Kids who feel good about themselves seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. They tend to smile more readily and enjoy life. These kids are realistic and generally optimistic.

In contrast, kids with low self-esteem can find challenges to be sources of major anxiety and frustration. Those who think poorly of themselves have a hard time finding solutions to problems. If given to self-critical thoughts such as "I'm no good" or "I can't do anything right," they may become passive, withdrawn, or depressed. Faced with a new challenge, their immediate response is "I can't."

Here's how you can play important role in promoting healthy self-esteem in your child.

### **What Is Self-Esteem?**

Self-esteem is the collection of beliefs or feelings we have about ourselves, our "self-perceptions." How we define ourselves influences our motivations, attitudes, and behaviors and affects our emotional adjustment.

Patterns of self-esteem start very early in life. For example, a toddler who reaches a milestone experiences a sense of accomplishment that bolsters self-esteem. Learning to roll over after dozens of unsuccessful attempts teaches a baby a "can-do" attitude.

The concept of success following persistence starts early. As kids try, fail, try again, fail again, and then finally succeed, they develop ideas about their own capabilities. At the same time, they're creating a self-concept based on interactions with other people. This is why parental involvement is key to helping kids form accurate, healthy self-perceptions.

Self-esteem also can be defined as feelings of capability combined with feelings of being loved. A child who is happy with an achievement but does not feel loved may eventually experience low self-esteem. Likewise, a child who feels loved but is hesitant about his or her own abilities can also end up with low self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem comes when the right balance is reached.

### **Signs of Unhealthy and Healthy Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem fluctuates as kids grow. It's frequently changed and fine-tuned, because it is affected by a child's experiences and new perceptions. So it helps to be aware of the signs of both healthy and unhealthy self-esteem.

Kids with low self-esteem may not want to try new things, and may frequently speak negatively about themselves: "I'm stupid," "I'll never learn how to do this," or "What's the point? Nobody cares about me anyway." They may exhibit a low tolerance for frustration, giving up easily or waiting for somebody else to take over. They tend to be overly critical of and easily disappointed in themselves. Kids with low self-esteem see temporary setbacks as permanent, intolerable conditions, and a sense of pessimism predominates.

Kids with healthy self-esteem tend to enjoy interacting with others. They're comfortable in social settings and enjoys group activities as well as independent pursuits. When challenges arise, they can work toward finding solutions and voice discontent without belittling themselves or others. For example, rather than saying, "I'm an idiot," a child with healthy self-esteem says, "I don't understand this." They know their strengths and weaknesses, and accept them. A sense of optimism prevails.

## How Parents Can Help

How can a parent help to foster healthy self-esteem in a child? These tips can make a big difference:

**Watch what you say.** Kids are very sensitive to parents' words. Remember to praise your child not only for a job well done, but also for effort. But be truthful. For example, if your child doesn't make the soccer team, avoid saying something like, "Well, next time you'll work harder and make it." Instead, try "Well, you didn't make the team, but I'm really proud of the effort you put into it." Reward effort and completion instead of outcome.

**Be a positive role model.** If you're excessively harsh on yourself, pessimistic, or unrealistic about your abilities and limitations, your child may eventually mirror you. Nurture your own self-esteem, and your child will have a great role model.

**Identify and redirect your child's inaccurate beliefs.** It's important for parents to identify kids' irrational beliefs about themselves, whether they're about perfection, attractiveness, ability, or anything else. Helping kids set more accurate standards and be more realistic in evaluating themselves will help them have a healthy self-concept. Inaccurate perceptions of self can take root and become reality to kids. For example, a child who does very well in school but struggles with math may say, "I can't do math. I'm a bad student." Not only is this a false generalization, it's also a belief that will set the child up for failure. Encourage kids to see a situation in its true light. A helpful response might be: "You are a good student. You do great in school. Math is just a subject that you need to spend more time on. We'll work on it together."

**Be spontaneous and affectionate.** Your love will go a long way to boost your child's self-esteem. Give hugs and tell kids you're proud of them. Pop a note in your child's lunchbox that reads, "I think you're terrific!" Give praise frequently and honestly, without overdoing it. Kids can tell whether something comes from the heart.

**Give positive, accurate feedback.** Comments like "You always work yourself up into such a frenzy!" will make kids feel like they have no control over their outbursts. A better statement is, "You were really mad at your brother. But I appreciate that you didn't yell at him or hit him." This acknowledges a child's feelings, rewards the choice made, and encourages the child to make the right choice again next time.

**Create a safe, loving home environment.** Kids who don't feel safe or are abused at home will suffer immensely from low self-esteem. A child who is exposed to parents who fight and argue repeatedly may become depressed and withdrawn. Also watch for signs of abuse by others, problems in school, trouble with peers, and other factors that may affect kids' self-esteem. Deal with these issues sensitively but swiftly. And always remember to respect your kids.

**Help kids become involved in constructive experiences.** Activities that encourage cooperation rather than competition are especially helpful in fostering self-esteem. For example, mentoring programs in which an older child helps a younger one learn to read can do wonders for both kids.