

Tips for students, parents

FROM C1

WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO TO REDUCE EXAM STRESS

1. Plan ahead

One way to reduce stress is to allow more time for work that needs to be done.

Students can also break down the revision into smaller sections and identify areas of weaknesses in past exams.

Analysing the situation and coming up with a suitable study plan for the remaining time before the exam will help to instil a sense of control in the student.

“If a student ignores the issue or distracts himself using social media or digital devices, it tends to make an individual feel more dread and helplessness,” said Institute of Mental Health child psychiatrist Jeremy Heng.

2. Make time for self-care

Have enough sleep, adequate time to relax mentally and good nutrition, say experts.

Ms Vivyan Chee, deputy director and head of Oasis for Minds Services at Singapore Children’s Society, said that as the exams draw near, students can consider activities that help to relax and rejuvenate the mind and body, such as yoga, meditation or hobbies that they enjoy.

3. Stay positive

Students can encourage themselves through positive affirmations and surround themselves with supportive friends who can

uplift them, said Ms Chee.

Psychologist and NIE senior lecturer Kit Phey Ling said it is important for students to know that some stress is normal when preparing for examinations, as it can help them feel more energised and focused.

Students can concentrate on the things they can control, for example, how they prepare for their examinations, she suggested.

“By focusing on things they can do, they will feel more empowered,” she said.

Another way is for students to set realistic expectations for themselves, for instance, based on their latest examination results.

4. Manage anxiety symptoms

Psychologist Amanda Ang from The Therapy Room suggested that students practise relaxation and stress management techniques in the run-up to exams.

Dr Kit added: “Practise such exercises when they are least stressed, until this becomes a habit. This will increase the chances of the student using these exercises automatically when stressed.”

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

Parents play a vital role because the root cause of children’s academic stress is often expectations from themselves and others around them, said Dr Heng.

1. Set realistic expectations

Parents can set realistic expectations by adjusting their aspirations to match children’s performance

and ability, added Dr Kit.

She pointed out that research showed that while children tend to perform well when their parents have high aspirations, they also perform worse when their parents have overly high aspirations because these parents tend to put more pressure on their children.

2. Provide a safe space

Ms Ang said parents can give their children a safe space to talk about their fears by responding in a non-judgmental way.

“Parents can validate their children’s emotions and respond with empathy, instead of replies like ‘don’t think about it’ or ‘just study harder,’” she advised.

They can try saying, “It must be very stressful preparing for the A levels. Perhaps you can share with me what are some of your worries?”

She encouraged parents to be fully present. “Listen for feelings and reflect them back, be curious, respond in ways that open up communication with your teen,” she said.

Ms Chee added that parents should aim to create a home environment that separates a child’s academic performance from their value in the family.

3. Stay calm

They should also model a calm approach to stressful situations to show a child how to handle anxiety effectively.

“Be cautious not to project your own anxieties and fears onto your child,” she said.