ORIEL HIGH SCHOOL

The Parents' Guide to Teenage stress & anxiety

2024-2025

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Spotting the signs
- Quick-fix solutions
- Building their resilience
- Why the basics aren't the basics
- Where to get support

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The Parents' Guide to

Teenage stress and anxiety

2024-2025

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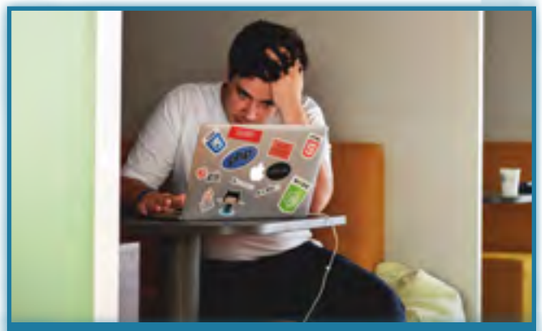

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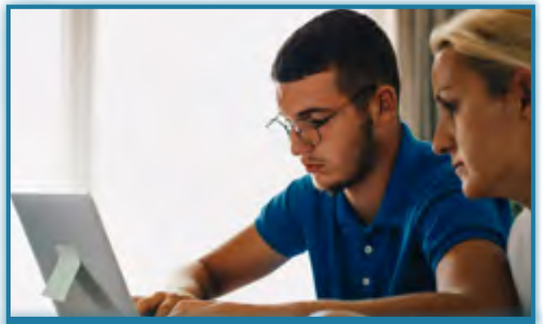

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Introduction

In small doses, stress can be a great motivator, helping us get things done. The problems set in when we experience high levels of stress over extended periods of time. That can be damaging, both to mental and physical health. It's a bit like pulling out all the stops and working at full pelt – all day every day. We simply can't keep it up.

Lots of things can cause us stress, and they're different person to person. Some people adore being the centre of attention, so a public speaking gig wouldn't make them stressed at all. For others who don't like being in the limelight, even the thought of presenting to an audience could release a wave of stress hormones, worse still having to do it for real.

Because stress is subjective, it can be overlooked. We might miss that other people could get stressed about things we find easy to cope with. Some people hide stress, worrying it could make them seem weak or incapable. We've outlined some indicators to help you spot the signs if your teen is getting too stressed. You can't stop your teen experiencing stress; however, you can help them develop systems to deal with it more effectively.

The best way to reduce stress is to create a life filled with habits that are known as effective stress busters. This builds mental resilience, meaning it's easier to bounce back from setbacks. We've outlined some of our favourites in this guide.

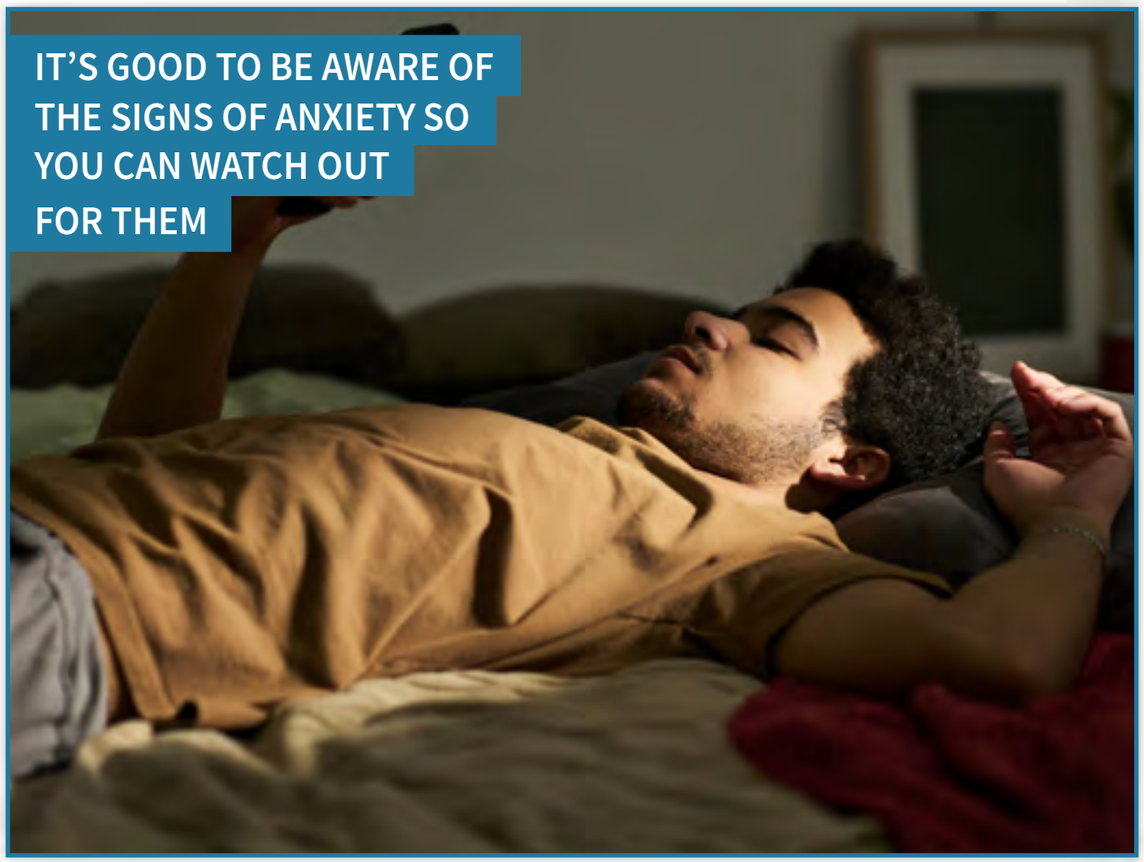
We're all for nurturing healthy habits long term as the best way to build mental resilience, but there are times when all of us succumb to a moment of stress and what's needed is a quick fix, so we've also included some ideas on things to do in the moment as well as ideas for long-term strategies.

Stress isn't something your or your teen need to deal with alone, so there's plenty of suggestions abut where to go for help and support if it's needed.

Spotting when they're stressed

It's perfectly natural for your child to be worried from time to time - it's something we all experience! In small doses, anxiety can be a good thing: helping your child to focus, get motivated and take action.

Prolonged periods or bouts of intense anxiety are likely to have a negative impact on both their physical and mental health, but there are lots of ways you can help them manage this anxiety. Some are "quick fix" solutions to help in the moment, others are long term interventions that make them more resilient to stress. In some cases, professional support may be required.



IT'S GOOD TO BE AWARE OF THE SIGNS OF ANXIETY SO YOU CAN WATCH OUT FOR THEM

How can you tell when your teen's experiencing too much stress and needs your help?

Signs of anxiety and stress

It's good to be aware of the signs of anxiety and stress so you can watch out for them. A change in behaviour for a day or two might be nothing to worry about, but if you notice a regular change, then it's usually a sign that something is wrong. Some of the more common signs of anxiety include:

- Losing interest in things they've previously enjoyed;
- Behaving in the opposite way to usual – quiet children can become very chatty, chatty children can get withdrawn;
- Being grumpy and irritable;
- Lots of headaches and digestive problems (stomach aches, diarrhoea, constipation, vomiting etc);
- Worrying all the time, this can show itself in only picturing negative outcomes (what if I fail, I'm going to fail, I can't do this);
- Talking over and over the same concern and being unable to either stop thinking about it or to find relief;
- Physical symptoms (sweaty palms, shaking, fast heartbeat, aching muscles);
- Restlessness and being unable to stay still;
- Inability to concentrate (such as taking in what's happening in a TV programme);
- Panic attacks;
- Not sleeping.

Remember to keep perspective. If they have had several late nights, they are likely to be tired and this increases irritability. If they've been exercising, they might have aching muscles. If they've just run to meet you, they'll have a fast heart rate. Individual or a short-term combination of the above symptoms are normal.

USEFUL LINKS:

- Anxiety UK
- Childline

Distraction techniques

If you notice your child is suffering, it's time to help them. That doesn't always mean you stepping in (that could add to the anxiety) although it's good to let them know you've noticed something's wrong and give them a chance to talk to you if they want to.

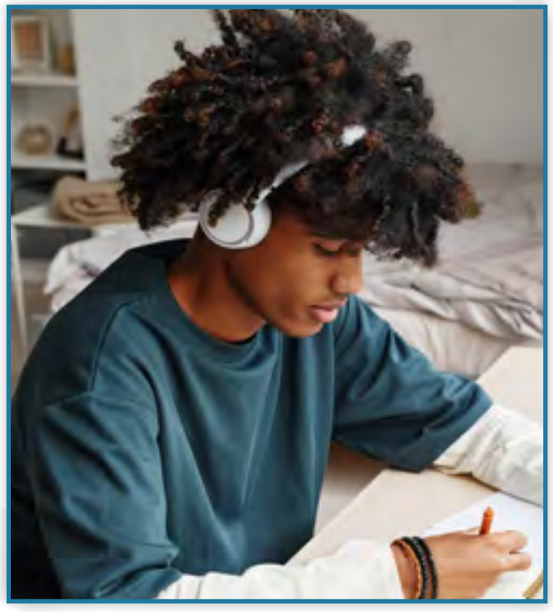
Avoid broaching the subject in front of others, this could make them feel embarrassed or inadequate and make them feel worse (they might think they are doing a job good of hiding it). Don't forget, the aim isn't to eliminate anxiety but to teach them how to manage it.

There are two ways to help: distracting them from the immediate problem or teaching them techniques to cope better with stress.

Let's start with distraction. Encourage them to take part in an activity that will stop them thinking about whatever is making them anxious. Giving the brain some time out from worrying can help obtain a better perspective later.

Physical activities – It doesn't matter what activity - dancing, football, swimming, walking – so long as it's something they enjoy, gets their endorphins flowing and requires focus so the mind is concentrating on something different. Team games are great, as connectivity and communications with others is restorative.

Music – Music has an amazing ability to transport you to a different time and place. Anything that evokes positive memories and experiences is a good thing. To reduce anxiety, it's better to listen to relaxing and calming music rather than something that stimulates.

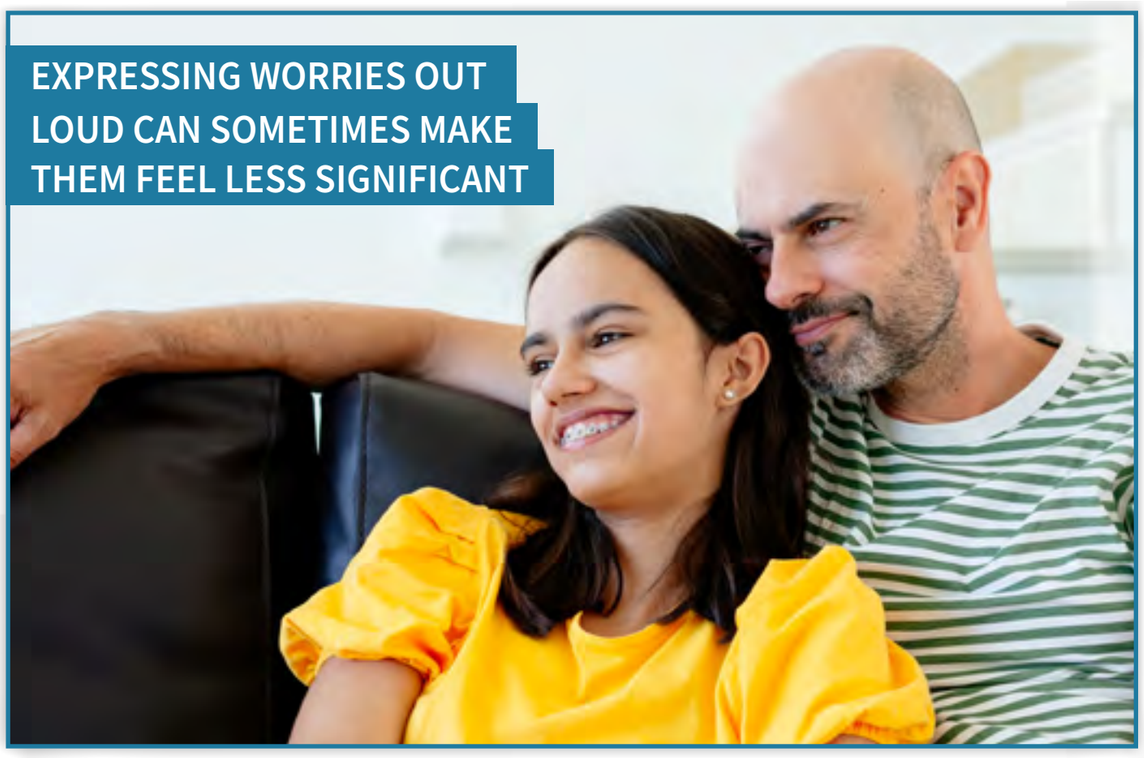


Talking – it may not be to you! A sibling, grandparent, family friend or friend at school or perhaps a charity chatline. Expressing worries out loud can sometimes make them feel less significant than when they're playing on loop in the mind. Talking aloud also encourages finding their own solutions – prompts such as 'what would need to happen to make you feel better', can help them reframe to seeking solutions rather than dwelling on troubles.

Laughing – releases feel good hormones, so encourage them to watch an episode of a favourite comedy or some You Tube clips so they can laugh out loud.

Avoiding stimulants – bright lights, loud music, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, too much excitement (a thrilling computer game, exciting movie) can all promote adrenaline production and increase feelings of anxiety, so these are best avoided.

Reducing lighting (have dimmable lights or table lamps in the bedroom) also helps to increase feelings of calm and can help prepare for sleep.



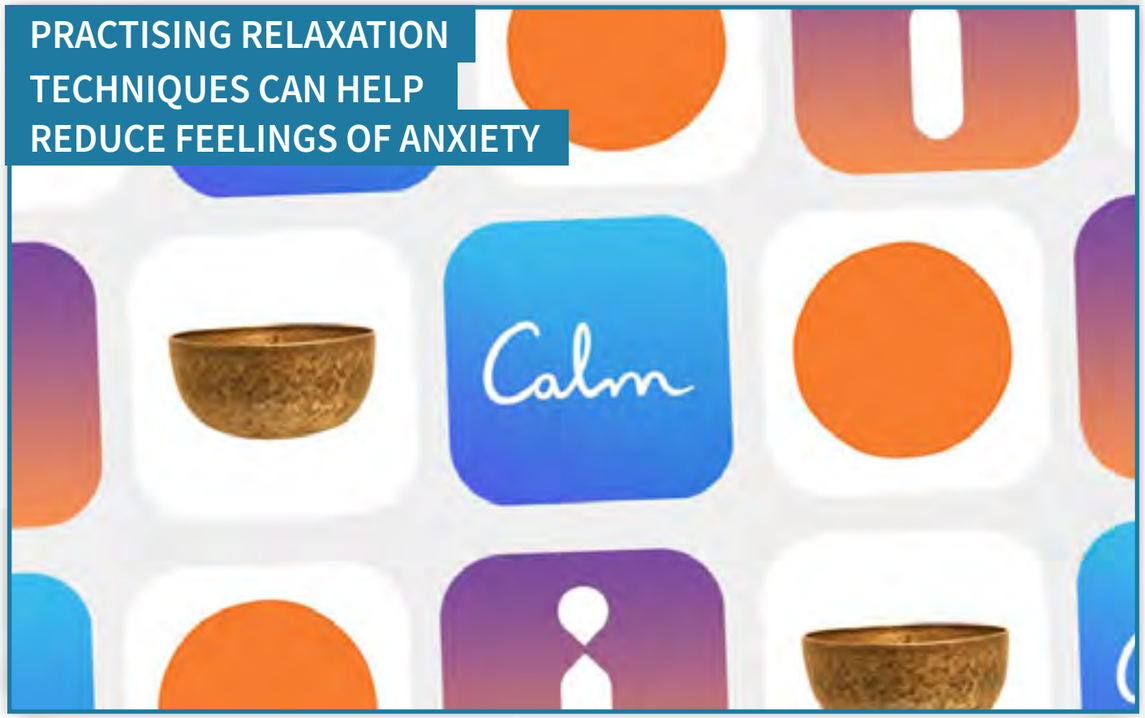
Proven ways to reduce stress

The second way to help is to provide an opportunity for them to learn some proven techniques which help reduce anxiety.

It's a really good idea for your child to practise some of these methods when they're not anxious, so they can familiarise themselves with the approaches and get comfortable with the experience and how it makes them feel. Then, should anxiety strike, it's something they're relaxed about doing. Regularly practising relaxation techniques helps keep anxiety at bay too. Some good choices are:

Breathing techniques - an effective way to regulate physical symptoms caused by stress. Learning slow breathing and how to take deep breaths has an immediate physical effect and is particularly useful in preventing anxiety escalating. Meditation, visualisation and yoga all encourage positive breathing techniques.

Apps like Headspace can be loaded on the phone so your child readily has help to hand in any place at any time.



PRACTISING RELAXATION TECHNIQUES CAN HELP REDUCE FEELINGS OF ANXIETY

Practising yoga regularly has been proven to improve the heart rate as well as physical strength. It takes a lot of concentration to get the positions right, which prevents the mind from thinking about other things.

Meditation transports the mind to a completely different place and experience. There are many different types of meditation including auditory (describing experiences) and visual (looking at something).

Breathing, yoga and meditation can be done in short or long bursts and alone or in groups, which makes them ideal to put into practise when on the go or needing a ready tool when nerves strike.

Herbs and smells – For centuries we've used herbs and smells to invoke different atmospheres. Essential oils can be burnt in diffusers, added to baths, placed on candles, mixed with water as a spritz or poured on a tissue (great for on the go and to pop in a pocket) and are inexpensive to buy. Some useful staples are: lemon (promotes concentration and calming); lavender (reduces stress and can help sleep), jasmine (uplifting and calming), peppermint (invigorating so helps to clear the mind) and rosemary (acts as a pick-me-up).

Herbal teas are a great caffeine free hot drink and, as well as benefiting from the smell, the herbs work within the system too. Try camomile, peppermint, lavender or lemon balm.

USEFUL LINKS:

- Headspace
- NHS
- Yoga for exam stress
- Engaging the senses

Quick-fix solutions

We're all for nurturing healthy habits long term as the best way to build mental resilience, but there are times when all of us succumb to a moment of stress and what's needed is a quick fix. With that in mind, here's 10 instant ways to reduce stress. They're easy to put into action and most of them can be done anywhere at any time; they will all have a positive impact in minutes.

1. Get laughing!

Laughter literally changes the chemical composition in the body. Put on a favourite comedy show, sit back and watch. Great if both concentration and energy levels are low, as it requires minimum effort. Half an hour is ideal, but there are lots of short clips on You Tube and a burst of laughter will reduce stress instantly. Unbelievably, faking a smile will have a similar effect, so if your teen's somewhere they can't get a comedy boost, pretending to smile will quickly result in them feeling more relaxed.

2. Take a brisk walk outdoors

Being physical is fantastic for both physical and mental health. This needn't be a great long trek – just ten minutes of brisk walking can get the circulation flowing, activate muscles, clear the head and stimulate the mind with more positive thoughts.

3. Breathe

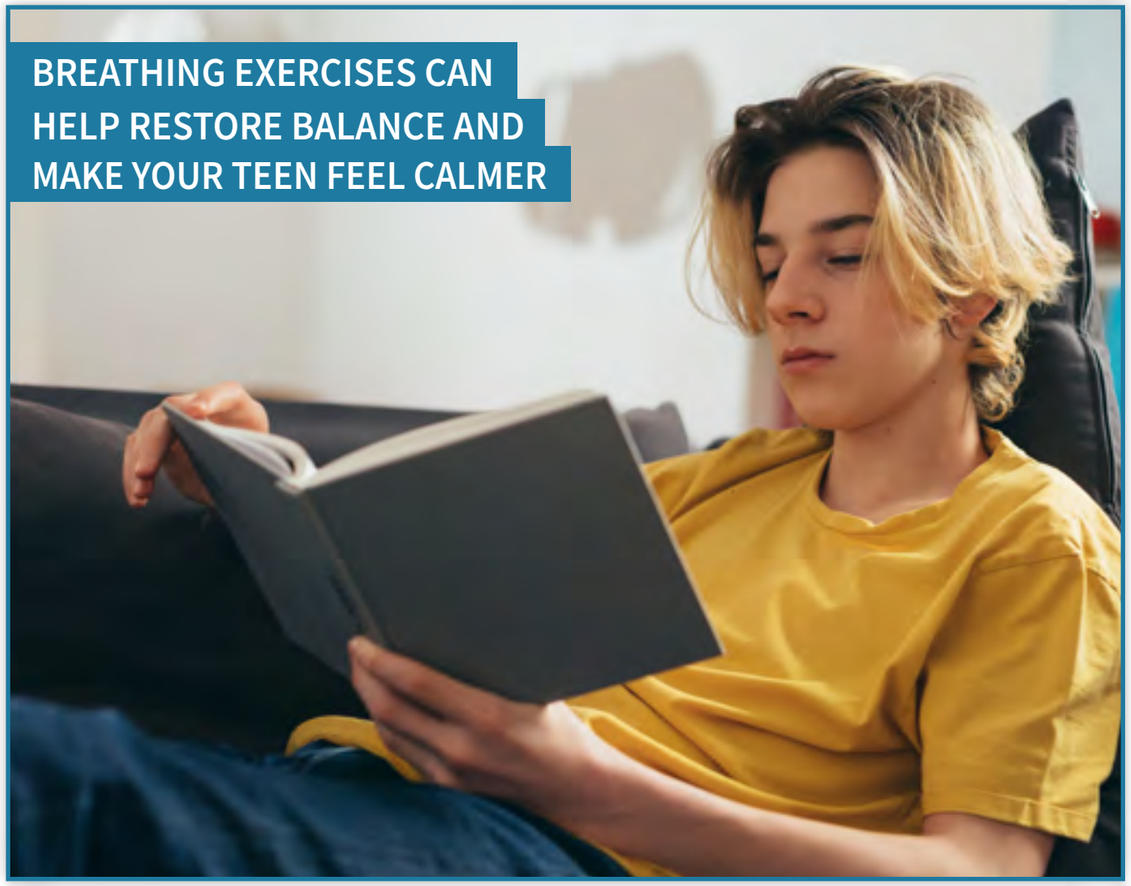
Stress can cause unhealthy breathing, so teach your teen some breathing techniques to help them instantly restore balance, reduce their heart rate and feel calmer. Simply breathing in through the nose for five seconds and then out through the mouth for five seconds can help – repeat this for two or three minutes.

4. Look at something inspiring

Whether it's a photo, picture, painting, fabric, building or statue, looking at inspiring things will give you a lift. Encourage your teen to keep photos of anything that sparks joy in them on their phones so it's easy to look at; each time they do, they'll get a boost of feel-good hormones.

5. Read (or listen to) a book

One of the great things about reading a book is that it's a creative process. Unlike a film where you're presented with images and just need to watch, as you read a book the writer is inviting you to picture the situation in a way that resonates with you. It's a terrific way to step into another world and place – even if only for a few minutes at a time.



6. Do something for someone else

Good deeds create virtuous circles. They're not only helpful to the recipient, the giver gets a feel good boost from helping someone else. Win-win all round. It's one of the reasons volunteering is a great idea. Doing the occasional thing for our friends, family and neighbours can create the same effect.

7. Take a bath

Another easy one when energy levels are low. For best effect, add some essential oils, bubble bath or anything that creates a smell that makes them feel nurtured (good examples are lavender, vanilla, chamomile or cinnamon). Lay back, relax in the warm water and stress will wash away. Great to try ahead of bedtime, to help promote a restful night's sleep.

8. Stretch

Stress tends to make us tense up, contracting muscles, folding inwards on ourselves, compressing the lungs and body. Make a conscious effort to combat stress by stretching one body area at a time (such as arms, legs, neck, feet, hands), pulling shoulders back to expand the lungs, and loosening the tension that's built up.

9. Play some music

There is no quicker and easier way to completely change your mood than listening to a piece of music. Make sure your teen's playing a feel-good vibe if they need uplifting, or a calming tempo if they're trying to relax.

10. Snuggle up with your pet

Having a cuddle with our furry friends can be very soothing and help relieve anxiety.

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Building mental resilience (mind)

The best way to reduce stress is to create a life filled with habits that are known as effective stress busters. This builds mental resilience, meaning it's easier to bounce back from set-backs. Here's our twenty favourite ideas to share with your teen, ten focusing on the mind and ten on the body.

1. Think of something else

Not as simple as it sounds but unbelievably effective and does work with training. Every time your mind wanders to what's bothering you, or if you keep replaying the same scenario over and over, make yourself think of something else. This is even more powerful if you think about something you like or an experience you enjoy.

2. Live in the moment

We can't change the past and we don't know what's going to happen in the future, so it's a surprise that lots of us spend most of our lives thinking about what's already happened or worrying about what might happen. Give yourself a break! Focus exclusively on what's happening right now.

3. Watch a film

Take a break and escape your mind for a couple of hours by watching a film. It's a good one if your energy levels are low.

4. Be grateful

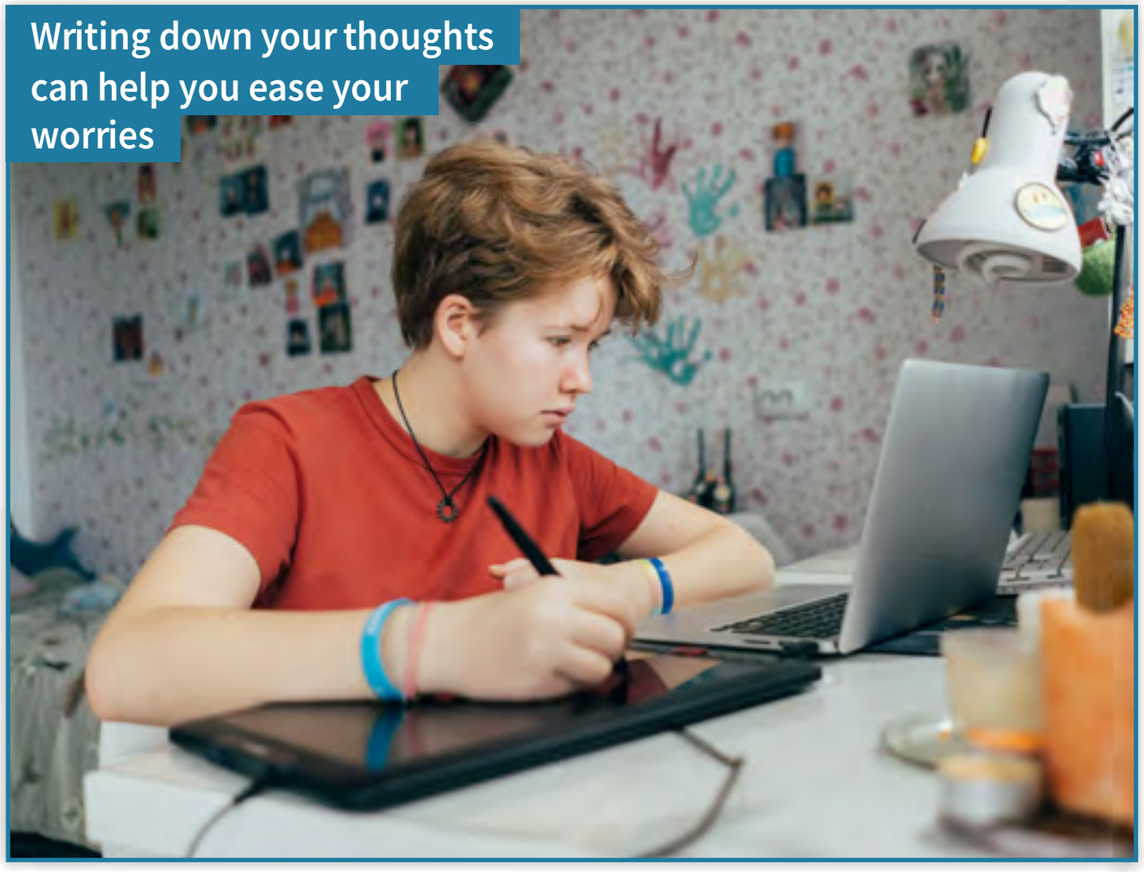
Gratitude and appreciation are core to feeling fulfilled, happy and contented, yet these feelings can too easily be over-shadowed by irritation, frustration and resentment, which can hijack our emotions to the exclusion of everything else. Take a few minutes every day to think of three things that you're grateful for. Better still, note them down in a journal.

5. Visualisation

Strange though it may seem, the mind doesn't often distinguish between what's actually happening and what we're thinking about. So picturing dreams, aspirations, nice things all help to create feelings of positivity. Your mind can take you anywhere, so why not let it take you somewhere nice?

6. Write down what's worrying you

Putting pen to paper (or fingers to the keypad) can help the mind switch off by providing reassurance that the worry won't be forgotten because it's down in black and white. Articulating the issue can also be helpful in gaining perspective on whether this is something that requires a lot of attention or can be put aside.



Writing down your thoughts can help you ease your worries

7. Create positive thought patterns

Our mind makes connections and these become automatic thought patterns over time. If we make associations that are negative, our mind jumps to the negative thoughts automatically whenever it recognizes the trigger. The trick is to create positive associations. This takes time to learn but is very effective. For example, instead of getting angry, frustrated and miserable if we can't do something we want to do, we create a link that takes us to thinking of the other great things to do if we can't act on our initial idea.

8. Talk about it

Saying out loud what's on your mind can really help see it from a different point of view and create perspective. Being able to talk to someone else also provides comfort that you're not having to deal with this alone – even if your confidante can't fix the problem for you.

9. Don't dwell on things you can't change

If you can do something about it, do something! But if there's nothing you can do (especially if what's upsetting you relates to something that's already happened), replaying it and thinking about it is simply destroying your present and could be holding you back from a great future. Draw a line, commit to doing things differently should a next time occur, stop thinking about it and move on. Allow yourself to be happy – you deserve it.

10. Meditating

Learn how to meditate and you'll be able to quieten your mind at will. It's invaluable. There are heaps of different meditation techniques, so find one that works for you. Our favourites are guided meditation and visual meditation.

USEFUL LINKS:

- Calm
- Gratitude (app)
- Insight timer
- Mindfulness journal

Building mental resilience (body)

1. Eat well

Stick to a regular, balanced diet. Avoid bingeing on sugary or salty foods, carbonated drinks or ready meals. Try nuts, fresh fruit, veg and something home-cooked instead. What you put inside you affects how you feel. By all means enjoy a treat – just now and then.

2. Hang out with friends

Our social networks are critical to wellbeing, especially for teens. Even if it's online, keep up with friends through calls, facetime and messaging – but all the better if you can meet up in person.

3. Avoid too much alcohol or other stimulants

In the short term, you might feel great (or better), but these props become less effective with regular use and can be harmful in the long term if you come to rely on them. Learn healthy ways to modify your mood.

4. Stay hydrated

We humans are two-thirds water, so drink plenty to keep fluids at the right level, allowing your millions of cells to do their thing at optimum capacity. Watery foods contribute, as do drinks containing diuretics (such as tea or coffee), but most people underestimate their fluid intake, so drinking about 1.5-2 litres of water every day will ensure you get enough.

5. Get out in nature

There is no substitute for the great outdoors. Nature is calming and soothing. Seeing and feeling the cycles of nature is reassuring and being physical is very good for you.

6. Yoga

It can take 100% concentration to get the poses right which means there's no brain space left for thinking of anything else. It gives the mind a complete rest. Yoga is brilliant for mind and body. It's not for everyone, but try a few sessions to see if it's for you.

7. Go swimming

Getting physical is a key way to reduce stress. The rhythmic, repetitive action of swimming is great for calming the mind (and strengthening the body) and concentrating on getting from one end of the pool to another gives your mind a much needed break.

8. Have a cup of tea

OK, so maybe this is a bit too British for some of you, but it's the comfort in the routine that makes this so effective. Boiling the kettle, selecting a tea, waiting for it to brew, customizing it to your exact personal taste and maybe even enjoying a biscuit alongside creates a routine focusing on something nice and reliable that you can repeat day after day.

9. Pamper yourself

Are you able to name something you can do just for yourself that really matters to you? If not, the starting point is to find one! Make sure you do something just for you on a regular basis. It might be an early night, reading in bed, going for a drive, taking 10 minutes quiet time, watching YouTube. Whatever it is, it should make you feel good and should be something you can do for yourself (not something you need someone else to do for you).

10. Sleep

Sleep is the number one contributor to good health. Without it, we can be tired, irritable, unable to concentrate, lethargic, impatient, argumentative, unable to eat – all traits that lead to feeling stressed and potentially creating stressful situations for ourselves through poor decision making and inappropriate reactions. Keep a regular bedtime and wake up routine, dim the lights a couple of hours before bed and switch off devices half-an-hour before trying to sleep to improve your chances of a good night's rest.

Look after the basics

How deeply we feel and react to things can be influenced by other factors too, so it's important you help your teen look after the basics. Over the next few pages we've got some hints and tips on ways you can help them avoid habits that are bad for them and adopt habits that will do them good.

For example, when we're tired everything feels worse. Getting enough sleep is the cornerstone to good health.

Likewise, what they're eating and drinking will affect their mood. A varied diet will ensure they're getting the full range of nutrients they need, so watch out for convenient snacks that are often unhealthy.

Are they drinking enough water or are they tucking into fizzy alternatives?

It's not just a question of all the sugars in pop, calorie-free options are filled with nasties and shouldn't be drunk regularly - though fine to have

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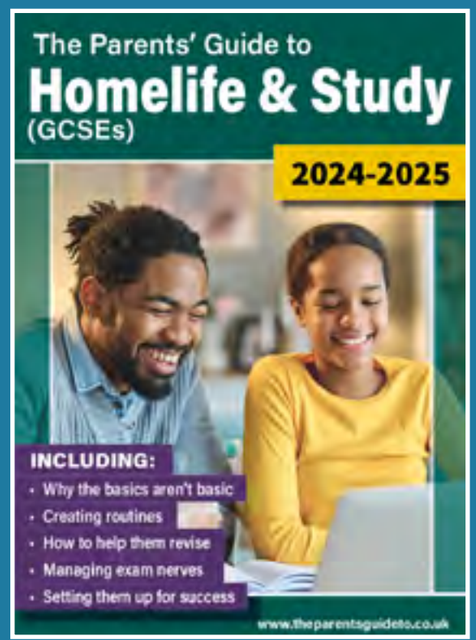
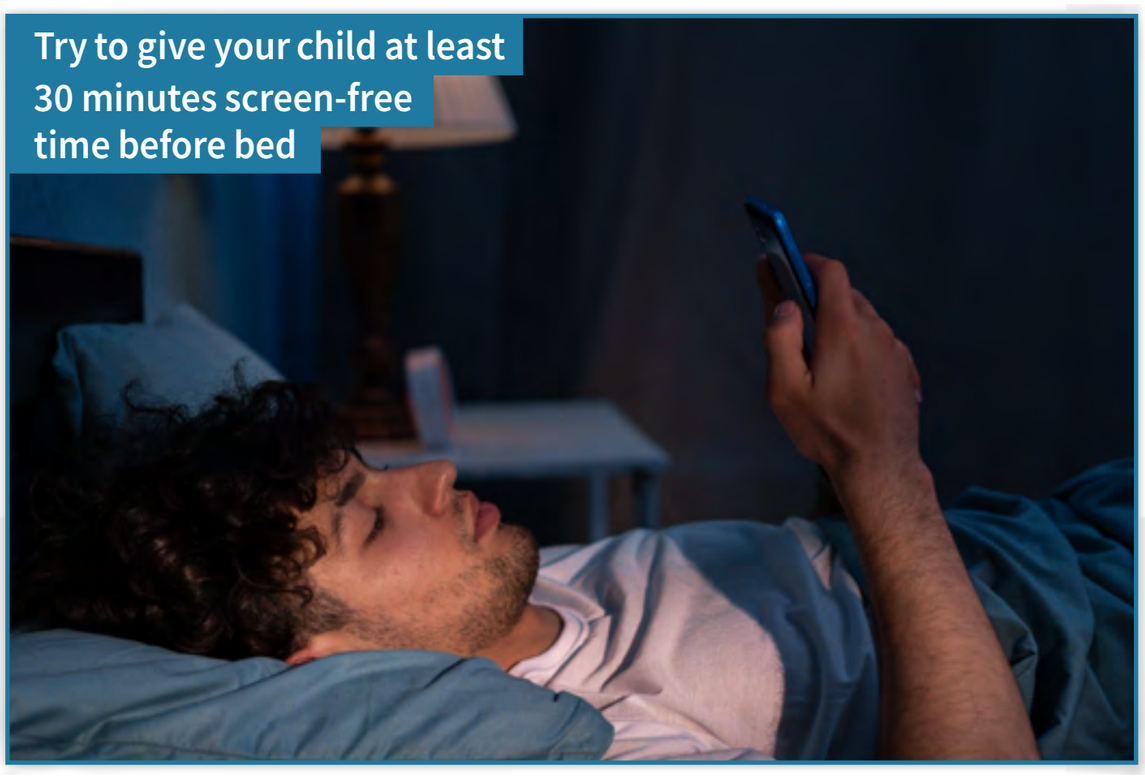


Sleep

Sleep is essential for good health, so make sure your teen is getting enough rest. Without enough sleep, they will struggle. Some symptoms include tiredness, irritability, lack of concentration, poor diet (not wanting to eat, or eating too many of the wrong things) and they're less likely to exercise. All of which will poorly influence how they feel and how well they cope with school life and life in general.

Many teens don't get enough sleep – either because they're revising into the small hours or more interesting temptations (such as box sets and social media) encourage them to stay awake. Being in bed doesn't count as being asleep! Teens need a lot of sleep – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night - given the huge changes taking place in their bodies. To make sure they're getting enough, work backwards. If they have to get up at 7.00am, then they need to be asleep by 11.00pm latest – which probably means heading to bed much earlier. At GCSE age, they should really be in bed by 10.00 pm latest.


Try to give your child at least 30 minutes screen-free time before bed

A bedtime routine

Creating a "bedtime" routine, such as switching the phone to silent, putting it away, taking a bath, having a hot drink and dimming the lights can all help calm the mind and prepare it for sleep. Sticking to a similar routine every night signals to the body that it is time for bed and helps it switch off, so try to get your teen into the habit of doing the same things before bed and going to sleep at a similar time (especially on weeknights, but even at the weekend too).

A little calm time before bed means avoiding stimulation. Studies should be packed away, no exciting films or video games, no high tempo music or bright lights.

If they're prone to worrying, keeping a notebook where any niggling thoughts or important things to do the next day can be jotted down. This will help stop them worrying about forgetting things and can help prevent the mind turning over once the lights go out.

If they share a room, curtaining off their sleeping area helps give them some personal space.

Be firm

It's not easy telling teens what to do, but if you can be firm about bedtime and winding down before sleep when they're in their mid-teens, there's a better chance they'll continue good habits by themselves in the future.

Try to have conversations with your teen about using mobiles sensibly, at times when neither of you are tired or emotional, to avoid heated discussions or rows. This way you're much more likely to reach a compromise that suits you both.

Avoid lie-ins

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning and, hard though it may be, try to limit lie-ins at the weekend. Long lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at an appropriate time on Sunday night and consequently, making it harder for them to wake up on time on Monday mornings. Where possible, bedtimes and get-up times should be similar from one day to the next allowing the body to synch to a regular cycle. Make plans for weekend mornings so they have a reason to get up.

Mobiles and screens – the enemy of sleep!

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by your teen's ready access to a 24/7 online community via social media, not to mention their compulsion to play games and catch up with box sets late into the night.

Encourage good habits. At least 30 mins screen-free time before settling down to sleep is always a good idea. It doesn't mean doing nothing – they could listen to audio books, podcasts or relaxing music, where the phone is closed (so no glare or visual stimulation) and they can enjoy listening to something relaxing as they drift off to sleep. There are timers too, so they don't need to fret that if they do fall asleep, their phone will be running all night.

Set phones to bedtime mode during sleeping hours so that they're not distracted by the tempting ping of alerts and messages – which they feel they must immediately view. Encourage them to use the "Do not disturb" feature if their phone has one, which will automatically silence incoming calls and messages at the same time each night (they can make exceptions for emergency numbers) and use the phone's night screen settings to reduces glare throughout the evening (white light on bright screens prevents sleepiness). Establishing good phone habits now will benefit them hugely later in life too.

Other ways to reduce phone time
Create rules for the whole family – such as no phones at the table during mealtimes, no phones before school, no phones after 9:00 pm. If you do this, it's important you're consistent (don't set a bad example by ignoring the rule if it doesn't suit you!). Establish rewards for appropriate phone use.

Some wireless providers allow you to set daily phone use limits, so you could add time limits for all apps, or different time limits for different apps. You could try the app OurPact, which enables you to block or grant access to internet time, from anywhere. Netflix allows you to modify user preferences, so you can restrict your teen watching at inappropriate times or block programmes and box sets that you don't want them to watch (removal won't be instant but will filter through). You could make some things available only via your profile so you're aware of what and when your child is watching. mSpy lets parents monitor their children's phone activity from their own devices.

Walk your talk!

Are you setting a good example? The older your child gets, the harder it is for you to insist on what they do, but you can encourage them by being a great role model. It might be harder for them to get into good sleep routines if they see you are not following the advice you give them.

Diet and nutrition

Food is fuel for the body, so making sure they eat at regular intervals with plenty of healthy ingredients is vital. Try to ensure they have a healthy breakfast before leaving the house (even if it is only cereal), provide a packed lunch and a nutritious supper in the evening.

A balanced diet

As well as their "five a day" (about a third of the overall diet), everyone should have some starchy carbohydrate (another third), and the remaining third split between protein and milk/dairy with a small amount of fat . Ensure vegetarians and vegans are getting enough protein with plenty of protein rich vegetables (such as peas, sprouts, sweetcorn, asparagus, broccoli and avocado) as well as nuts, pulses and beans.

Good food choices to maximise concentration include green leafy vegetables, herbs, oily fish and pulses so try to include these as a regular part of their diet – it will be good for the whole family too!

Eating regularly

It's important that teenagers eat at regular intervals to avoid peaks and dips in energy levels. Breakfast, lunch and dinner should be punctuated with healthy snacks. Providing a packed lunch and snacks for them when they are on the go can help ensure they are eating the right types of food. If possible, sit down for a family meal together at the end of each day (mobile and tablet free!). Not only will this start a fantastic lifestyle habit for them to take through to adulthood, it will also provide a break from being online and a chance to chat and share one another's experiences that day.

USEFUL LINKS:

- NHS - Eatwell Guide
- BBC Good Food

Snacking

The temptation to eat sugary, highly salted, unhealthy snacks to keep energy levels up is not only bad for overall health but can negatively impair their performance and ability to concentrate. Help them make the right choices when they are in a hurry by providing them with healthy alternatives. If chocolate is a must, swap milk chocolate or chocolate bars for dark chocolate.

This doesn't mean they can't have an occasional treat, but it's better to avoid eating high sugar and salty foods too often.

Cook together

Whilst it may not be possible every night, it's great if you can include some home-cooked meals (from scratch) regularly throughout the week. Not only is this much healthier and cheaper than buying ready-meals and take-aways, it's one of the best lifestyle habits to teach your child which they'll benefit from throughout their adult life.

Cooking together provides a very good opportunity to spend time together and bond. It's a non-pressurized space for them to talk to you about things that may be troubling them without making it the central focus – you can catch up on good news too.

Keep the house stocked with plenty of healthy snacks

Healthy snacks shopping list

- Apple slices with almond butter
- Avocado on wholemeal toast
- Banana and peanut butter
- Berry smoothie with Greek yoghurt
- Blueberries with cottage cheese
- Carrot sticks with hummus
- Celery sticks with cream cheese
- Chia pudding with berries
- Cucumber slices with tzatziki
- Dark chocolate (70% plus)
- Edamame beans
- Greek yoghurt with honey and nuts
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Homemade granola bars
- Kale crisps
- Mixed nuts and dried fruit
- Oatcakes / flapjacks
- Olives and feta cheese
- Popcorn (air-popped)
- Raspberries with dark chocolate chips
- Rice cakes
- Sliced peppers with guacamole
- Strawberries dipped in Greek yoghurt

Growing up

As your teen gets older and more independent, they'll start preparing their own food and it's not possible for you to watch what they're eating every meal time. Remember, they are going to eat what you have available in the house, so if your fridge, freezer and cupboards are full of good options, that's what they'll reach for when they're hungry.

When they're eating away from home (for example at school) try to provide food, rather than money, so they're not tempted to spend on unhealthy favourites.

Fast food, sweets, crisps and other treats are absolutely fine, so long as they are a small part of an overall diet and not the staple foods. However, tired teenagers are often tempted by convenience and "quick fix" energy boosts so may be drawn towards unhealthy options despite your best efforts to encourage them otherwise.

Walk your talk!

The foods you have available in your house, and what you eat will influence your child's choices. Are you being a good role model?

Keeping hydrated improves concentration and focus

Hydration

A large proportion of the body is made up of water. Not drinking enough reduces productivity, both mentally and physically, and symptoms can include tiredness, confusion, reduced energy levels and the temptation to snack when not actually hungry (thirst is often mistaken for hunger).

Have water on hand at all times

The best way to make sure your child is drinking enough is to ensure they have water on hand at all times – at their desk, in bottles in their bag when on the go, and served alongside food. Plain water is ideal, but to add interest, use natural ingredients to give flavour – such as cucumber, lemon, lime, orange, tangerine, mint or ginger.

Other drinks

Natural fruit juices are great, but can be high in natural sugar, so why not dilute them? Herbal teas or honey with a dash of lemon offer hot, caffeine free alternatives. Limit your child's fizzy drink intake – whether calorie controlled or not, including energy drinks. They are all unhealthy if drunk in large quantities.

What's enough?

Some fluid intake comes from food (usually around 20%) and the rest from drinks. The amount needed can vary from day to day. For example, hot weather and exercise could mean sweating more, so it would be important to drink extra to replace the fluid lost.

The Eatwell Guide recommends drinking 6-8 glasses of water each day, which is about 1.5-2 litres. Tea and coffee count towards this.

Walk your talk!

If your child never sees you drinking a glass of water they are less likely to think of drinking themselves.

USEFUL LINKS:

- NHS Live Well
- Nutrition.org.uk

Caffeine

Caffeine is well-known for increasing energy levels and it's easily available, so many teens look to it for a boost when they're flagging. It's fast-acting, meaning most of us can feel the effects within half-an-hour of having caffeine, and for some in less than five minutes!

Caffeine affects us all in different ways, and whilst initially the impact can be positive (feeling more awake and able to concentrate), caffeine stays in the system for up to twelve hours, and can have negative side-effects such as preventing sleep, and causing restlessness and anxiety. Some people are more sensitive to it than others.

On average, adults shouldn't consume more than 400mg of caffeine a day and adolescents should have much less. Like most things, in large doses caffeine can be harmful.

Does coffee-free mean caffeine-free?

We all know there's caffeine in coffee, but it's also in tea, energy drinks and chocolate, so keep an eye on how much of these your child consumes. Drinks with high caffeine (more than 150mg per litre) need to show this on the label, although it is not always clear – and it doesn't apply to drinks bought in coffee shops.

If your child regularly drinks one or two cups of coffee each day, it's absolutely fine to continue this, even during exam time, as their body will be used to it. What's not good is introducing changes, so they shouldn't start drinking a cup of coffee or two during revision periods to help keep them alert if this is not something they do regularly. It's more likely to make them jittery, hyper and unable to concentrate.

Lots of products high in caffeine are available in health food shops which can give the impression that they're good for wellbeing, but drinking or eating too much can have negative side-effects.

Energy shots and drinks

Energy shots are often very high in caffeine and a firm favourite with teens. They can be deceptive as they are tiny in quantity but often packed with caffeine – for example a 60 ml shot can contain around 200mg of caffeine. Likewise, many energy drinks don't necessarily have huge percentages of caffeine, but they are served in large volumes (half litre bottles) so the amount of caffeine your child is drinking is a lot (160mg of caffeine in a can of Monster), whereas a small glass of the same product would be fine. Most supermarkets and high street stores have banned sales of energy drinks to under 16s.

Food

Less obvious sources of caffeine are foods. Chocolate cake with chocolate frosting or cup cakes with chocolate topping are likely to be very high in caffeine (as well as sugar) so this is not ideal to eat as a dessert after dinner. Likewise coffee flavoured products can also contain lots of caffeine, so look out for ice-creams, frozen yogurts and milkshakes.

Isotonic gels

Teens often love isotonic gels, some of which contain as much as 75 mg of caffeine per pack. These are fine consumed in moderation but watch out that your child isn't having too many or substituting an energy rush when they are thirsty and should be drinking water.

Effects of caffeine

Too much caffeine can result in loss of sleep, loss of energy, low mood and low concentration – the opposite of what's needed to revise well. Caffeine is also long lasting, so drinking caffeine-high drinks in the afternoon can still impact on your child's ability to sleep that night. It's an absolute no to drinking coffee (or other caffeine fuelled drinks) late in the evening to try and overcome tiredness and revise into the night.

Keep an eye on their caffeine intake and, if possible, get them to avoid it completely from lunchtime as a year-round rule.

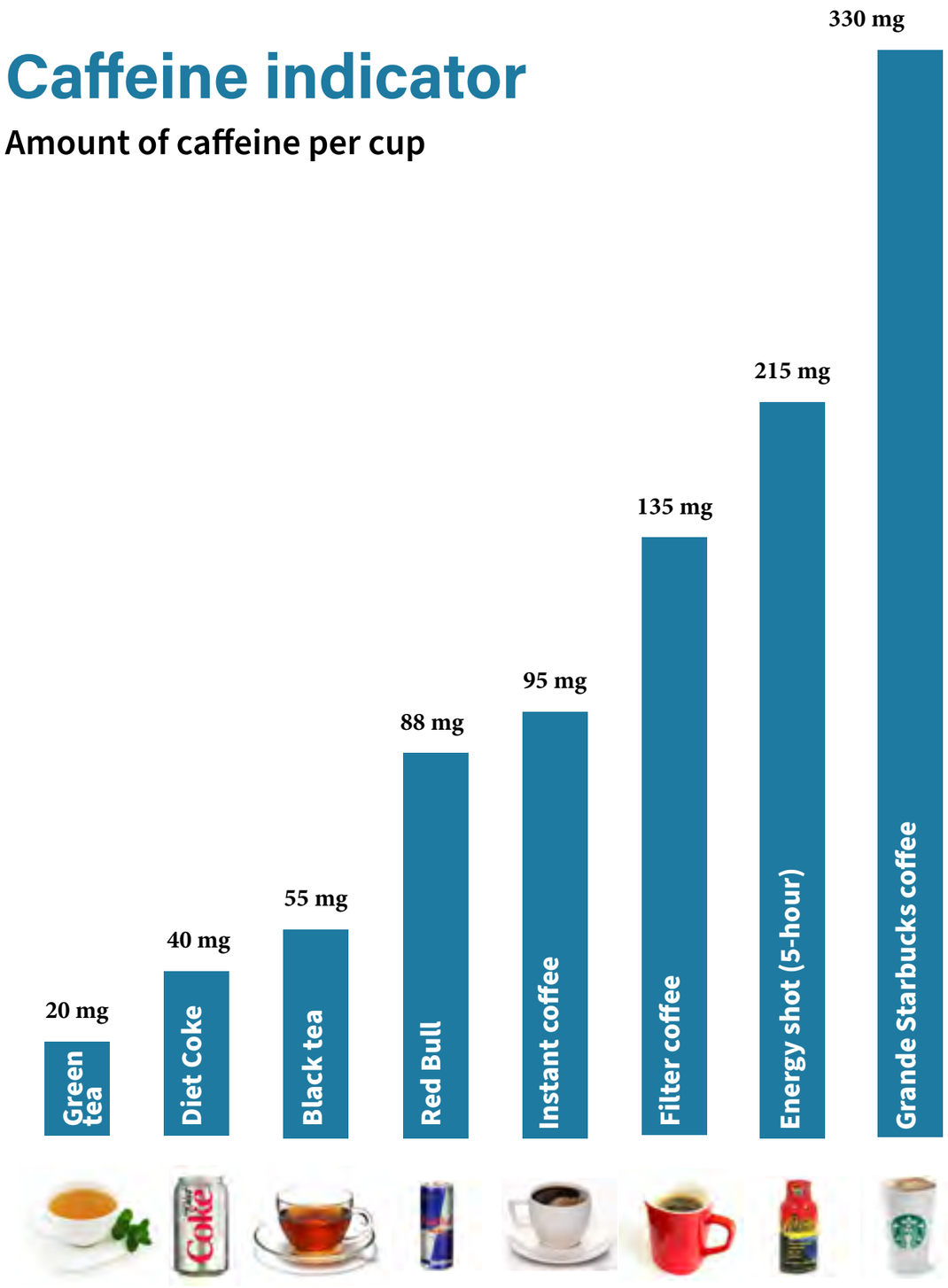
Walk your talk!

If you're reaching for a strong coffee several times daily to try and keep your energy levels up, you're impacting your own ability to sleep at night, as well as sending the wrong message on how to manage tiredness.

Caffeine in moderation is OK but try not to let your child consume too much

Caffeine indicator

Amount of caffeine per cup



Dealing with rejection

Experiencing rejection for the first time can be tough. Whether they've applied for an apprenticeship, university place, job or other next step, competition for places can be highly competitive and, inevitably, some applicants get turned down.

As adults, we have had many years to develop the coping mechanisms to deal with this type of disappointment.

However, this may be your child's first experience of rejection and it can feel very personal - perhaps even like it's the end of the world. But it isn't! Help your teen accept and move on from the decision, without it damaging their self-confidence or causing them-unnecessary stress and anxiety.

It's OK to feel hurt

Rejection can be hurtful and it's OK to acknowledge this. Don't dismiss their feelings by saying "everything's going to work out fine" (even though it will and this is good advice in the long-term) before allowing them chance to express how they feel and perhaps even cry or rant a bit. That said, it's important they feel reassured that rejection does not define them as a failure.

Disappointment is an element of life, the key is to take stock, learn any lessons that could be helpful in the future and move on. This is part of building resilience - the ability to bounce back from setbacks rather than being overwhelmed by them.

Helping them regain control

Encourage your child to request feedback about any rejections. Whilst not all companies offer this, many do. Feedback will help your child understand the reasons for not being successful and will help them improve for future interviews and applications. Companies have a lot of experience in providing feedback and it is likely to be sensitive and constructive.

USEFUL LINKS:

- UCAS and rejections

Reduce the power of rejection

Try to encourage your child to research and apply for more than one opportunity at a time. If possible, aim for several applications concurrently. This way your child isn't placing all their eggs in one basket and thinking their entire future depends on one pathway. Instead, if one doesn't work out, they've still got open possibilities with others.

This is easy to achieve with university applications because they'll apply for five universities via UCAS and that's an automatic part of the process. It's less obvious with jobs and apprenticeships, especially as applications for these need to be made individually and each one takes a lot of work. However, where possible, they should invest the time and make multiple applications, aiming to keep their options open - it will serve them well in the long term.

Find out what they can do next:

The Parents' Guide to Post 16 Options:

- What qualifications are on offer
- Where they can study
- Considerations

The Parents' Guide to Post 18 Options:

- What's on offer
- Getting ready for results day 2025
- Preparing for next steps

Buy now - Post 16 options

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Reframing

How we perceive a situation will have a significant impact on how we feel about it. Using the reframing technique of looking at a situation from a more positive angle can help them feel better and improve their mindset, even though the situation itself has not changed at all.

This can also be helpful in highlighting that no situation, however appealing, is perfect and that there are always some drawbacks. For example, they may have missed out on an apprenticeship opportunity that they felt was 100% the sure route to their success. They can take a notepad and jot down all the ways they felt it was right. Then clean the slate and write down any ways it wasn't perfect. Did it mean moving some distance from home? Was it especially competitive and likely to be tiring to keep up? Were there elements of the job/training they were less keen on and will no longer have to accept on another course?

Long term viewpoints

There's a lot to be said for living in the here and now, but sometimes teens need to look ahead to the future. There can be many routes to the same destination, so they should keep an eye on their long term ambitions (and what they'd like to achieve) and remain flexible about the different ways of getting there.

Talking it through

It may not be to you! A sibling, grandparent, family friend or friend at school could offer a sympathetic ear. Expressing worries out loud can sometimes make them feel less significant than when they're playing on loop in the mind. The act of vocalizing and explaining feelings to another can also help put them in perspective, whereas internalizing and thinking negative thoughts over and over can encourage them to feel bigger. Your teen needs to remember they control their thoughts - not the other way around and talking through their feelings can help crystalize this by restructuring thoughts into coherent sentences.

Relaxation

Highly charged emotions are tiring and elevate stress response hormones in the body. Try to get your teen to counter this by:

- ✓ doing something physical to burn off excess energy and release natural feel-good hormones;
- ✓ taking their mind off their disappointment by doing something that makes them laugh (and thereby literally changing the chemical balance in the body);
- ✓ doing something relaxing and soothing - perhaps cooking, taking a bath, listening to music;
- ✓ practising breathing techniques.

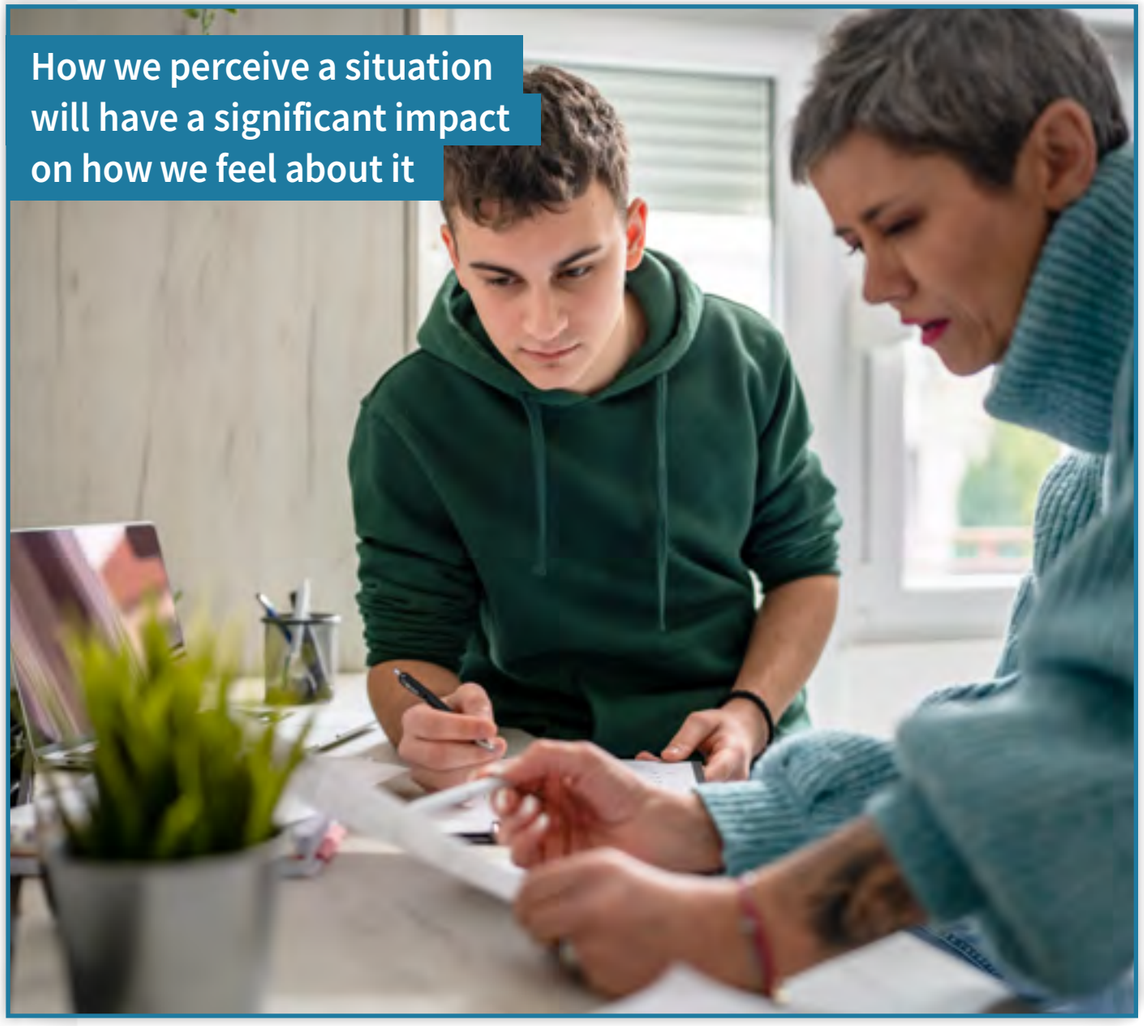
Timing

Bear in mind that letters of decline often happen in the lead up to examinations. Try your best to prevent this from having a negative impact on your child's study or revision efforts by using some of the relaxation ideas mentioned above.

Don't forget!

Do not encourage negative self-talk. Instead, try to get them to talk through what they have learned from the experience and what they might do differently next time.

Be there. Listen carefully to their feelings and reassure them that in the long-run, things will work out.



Where to get support

Don't be tough on yourself and expect to have all the solutions for your child's needs. It's absolutely fine to call on professionals to help you help them. Professional support includes more than counsellors and psychiatrists (although both these approaches can be helpful). There's a range of professional options availa-ble including:

1. Teachers at school – both in an academic capacity to help understand subjects better, as tutors to help create better ways of working outside school and pastoral experts who can help with emotional issues;
2. Some schools have an independ-ent counsellor available with whom your children can talk in confidence (i.e. they will not relay the information to the school);
3. Peer support networks – these can be very helpful as speaking to someone of a similar age can sometimes feel easier than speaking to an adult, or speaking to someone just slightly older, who has more recently been through a similar experience can be very reassuring;
4. Charities – most now offer both online and telephone support. This anonymity (i.e. not being face-to-face) can make talking over problems and worries easier.

Too much anxiety

If your child is showing several signs of anxiety on a regular basis (several days each week) over a prolonged period of time (several weeks) then do seek help from external support services and a good place to start might be visiting your GP.

AnxietyUK

NHS

mind for better mental health

SAMARITANS

A-Z of support

	Organisation	Contact
Anxiety UK	**Anxiety UK** Support and help for those who have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition	Website
At a Loss.org	**At a loss** The UK's signposting website for the bereaved. They can help you find bereavement services and counselling	Website
Beat	**BEAT** A website dedicated to Eating Disorders - including support for parents / carers who may be affected by an eating disorder	Website
CALM	**CALM** A helpline for men in the UK who are down or have hit a wall for any reason, who need to talk or find information and support.	Website
Mental Health Foundation Scotland	**Mental Health Foundation** Support and advice to help people understand, protect and sustain their mental health	Website
mind For better mental health	**Mind** A site with support and advice for parents who are worried about a young person's mental health or supporting a young person who's living with a mental health problem.	Website

	Organisation	Contact
No Panic	**No Panic** No Panic offers advice, support, recovery programs and help for people living with phobias, OCD and any other anxiety-based disorders	Website
NSPCC	**NSPCC** Support and tips to help parents keep children safe. From advice on children's mental health to staying safe online	Website
PAPYRUS	**PAPYRUS** A charity dedicated to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of positive mental health and emotional wellbeing in young people	Website
Place 2Be	**Place 2 Be** Advice and resources for parents and carers to help support their child or young person's wellbeing	Website
Rethink Mental Illness.	**Rethink Mental Illness** Aims to improve the lives of people severely affected by mental illness through their network of local groups and services	Website
SAMARITANS	**Samaritans** A registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress or struggling to cope	Website
the SANE	**SANE** SANE has a range of services to help improve the quality of life for anyone affected by mental illness.	Website
YOUNGMiNDS	**Young Minds** Lots of practical advice and tips on supporting young people. There's also a Parent Helpline if you're worried about a child or young person	Website

The Parents' Guide to:

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Our range of interactive guides provide you with easy to follow advice, hyperlinks to reliable sources and the most up-to-date information.

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1. Helping your teen find work experience
2. Teach your teen the skills to study effectively
3. Stressed out teen? – 10 ways to reduce stress instantly
4. Why starting a business helps develop transferable skills
5. Ways to keep your teen safe online

www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/tips

Subscribe to our parent newsletter:

If you're interested in regular updates about other ways you can help your teenage children, click here and join our online community.

Final Words

What you say matters

A common reason for children being anxious is the expectation their parents have and the worry that they cannot live up to it and will let everyone down. You may unwittingly be putting pressure on your child by being positive about how well they will do. You may think you're being reassuring by saying, "of course you're going to be a great success" and expressing your faith in them; they may misinterpret what you mean and take it that if they aren't a great success you'll be disappointed and think less of them.

That's why it's a good idea to focus on effort rather than outcomes: "I'm really impressed that you finished your homework this afternoon" gives positive reinforcement for something good that's been accomplished, rather than "Well done, doing your homework is really going to help you pass your exams" which sets an expectation for a future event yet to be achieved.

Be positive

Be positive and reassure them about what they have achieved to help boost their confidence. Don't add to their stress by telling them off about not doing enough (even if that's what you think!).

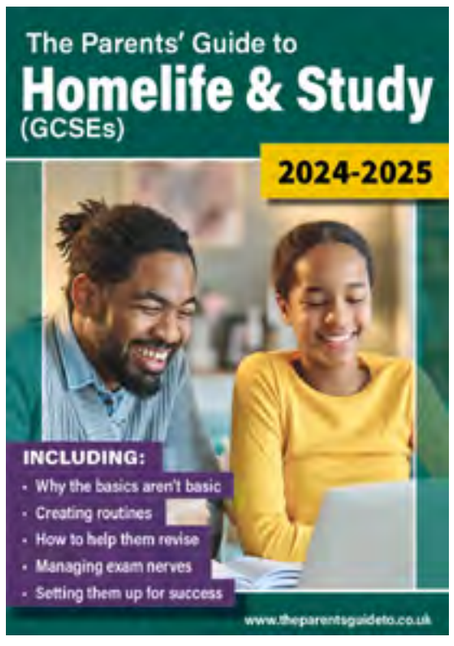
Be interested

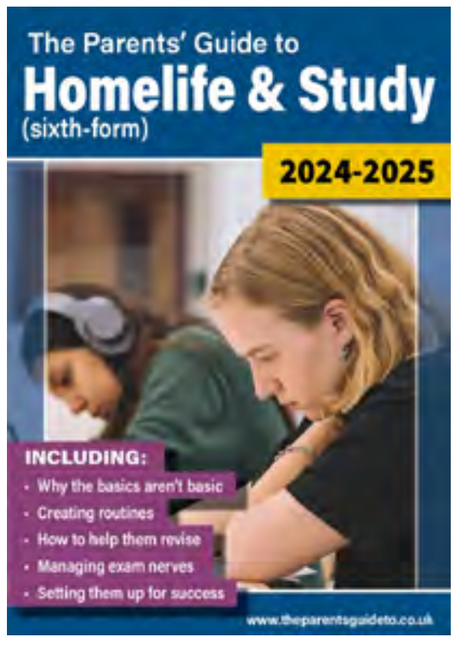
Give your child an opportunity to chat with you regularly (preferably each day) to talk through how they feel and what's been happening. This doesn't need to be a heavy session. Regular chats about what's been going on during the day might help them open up when things aren't going so well - because the situation of chatting to you feels natural and not a big event.

Life's not perfect

You can't banish stress from your teen's life, but you can give them the tools to build resilience enabling them to bounce back. Don't forget, it's not all up to you - there are plenty of ways to get support, so do reach out when help is needed.

Browse the full collection:





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Teenage stress & anxiety

2024-2025

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Spotting the signs
- Quick-fix solutions
- Building their resilience
- Why the basics aren't the basics
- Where to get support

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