

The next few months are crucial for your child as they will sit their GCSEs in the summer. These are important exams for your child as the grades achieved will determine what he or she does next in life. You will want your child to achieve the best grades that they can and this can be made possible when there is a partnership between the pupil, the school and parents.

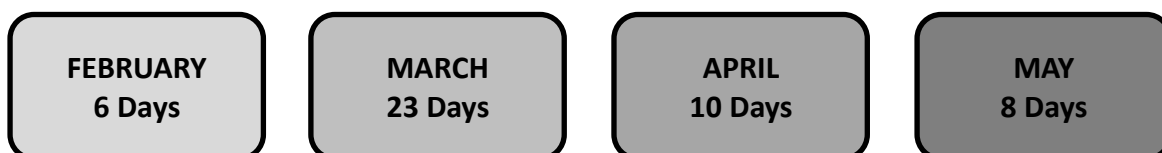
Preparing for GCSEs, however, can be a challenging time for the entire family. Children are put under pressure to succeed and you as parents try everything you can to help your son/daughter do just that. However, some of you may feel unsure of how to proceed. Maybe you aren't comfortable helping out because you are not knowledgeable in a specific subject or are confused with the current complicated GCSE system that resembles nothing like the exams you took.

The hardest demand on Year 11 is that understanding of the long-term importance of doing the best they can, and learning to shelve short term fun in the interest of long term benefits. There is still enough time for pupils to prepare if they are organised and work hard. There are a number of simple things that you can do as parents to help your child to be as prepared as possible. Many studies have shown that pupils with parents who take on a more active role in their education generally do better in exams. Parental support is significantly more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a study by The Campaign for Learning which found that parental involvement in a child's education can mean the difference between grades at GCSE. And the great news is that you don't need to be an expert to become involved. There are a variety of ways you can help to prepare your child for their GCSE exams. You can play a huge part in motivating your child just by giving unwavering support, offering constant encouragement and showing interest.

You may feel that you are worrying more than your son or daughter is! You may feel anxious that your child is working too hard, or you may feel that he or she is simply not doing enough. Whatever stage you are at, this booklet is designed to give you some practical tips to support your child through the next few months.

Clearly you know your son or daughter best, and this booklet sets out some suggestions for you to work alongside him or her. It does not offer a quick solution to the problem of revision because there is no quick fix. We hope you will find its contents have something to offer you and your own situation.

Countdown to Exams – Number of school days before GCSE exams begin



What can parents do to help?

Help your child to start preparing for their GCSE exams now! If homework and revision are left to the last minute, this will limit your child's chance of doing their best.

Over the coming weeks and months:

- Ensure that your child attends school regularly and is punctual. Every day lost in attendance reduces their chance of achieving their best at GCSE.
- Encourage your son/daughter to persevere and to work hard now in preparation for the exams.
- Check that your child is keeping up to date with homework. If a pupil in Year 11 says that they do not have any homework, it is not true as there are numerous things that they could be getting on with to support their studies.
- Encourage your child to begin revising now – it's never too early!
- Establish how much time they have available between now and the exams, and then draw up a realistic timetable together. Their study/revision timetable should include the dates and times of the GCSE examinations in May and June. The timetable should then be used to plan revision sessions. These should be spread out evenly so that your son/daughter is not planning to do too much all at once. Have the timetable displayed in their room to help them stick to the plan.
- Ask to see your son/daughter's homework or revision notes.
- Make sure that your child speaks to the teachers if he/she is having difficulties.
- Ideally your child should be aiming to complete around 2 hours of revision every evening in the run up to the examinations.
- Encourage your son/daughter to attend Subject Clubs and revision sessions offered at school.
- Make sure that he/she has all the books needed to hand to avoid wasted time.
- Check how your child is doing by asking him/her to explain something that has just been revised.

So you have set a revision plan together, what next?

- Encourage and support your child to stick to it! That way you can help them to keep track of how much work they have done and what they have left to cover.
- Choose a place in the house to revise where they won't be distracted.
- Also make all of your family members aware of the fact that your child will need some peace and quiet during this time, so they know not to disturb them.
- Switching revision between subjects avoids them becoming bored of a single topic.
- Look for fresh sources of information other than class notes. The internet, for example, offers some innovative learning resources although it is very easy to get distracted from the task in hand!
- You can offer small 'rewards' after every revision session. Nothing extravagant, just a small treat to help them to get back to their books.
- Ensure that your child avoids last-minute revision the night before an exam. Instead, support them to complete their revision plan early.

How can my child revise successfully?

There is a common misconception that "serious revision" equates to studying for hours on end. Marathon studying sessions are certainly not recommended. Encourage revision sessions with short breaks in between. Optimally, pupils should study for no more than 4 hours per day.

Studying for long stretches of hours is counterproductive because the brain will become tired, they will experience difficulty in focusing and increasingly less and less information will be retained. The fundamental principle to revising is to do it regularly and constantly, little chunks at a time. A pupil who studies for 2 hours 7 days a week would be much better off than a pupil who studies for 10 hours on both Saturday and Sunday.

You can support your son/daughter by helping them to follow the following tips and techniques:

- Do not revise for more than one hour without taking a 5 – 10 minute break.
- Stay focused. Hours can easily be wasted on social media and mobile phones.
- In the evenings after school plan to revise one or two subjects but leave some time for relaxation as well.
- Plan to revise specific topics in each subject, not everything at once. Rather than studying Maths and French, for example, focus on algebra and irregular verbs.
- Ensure that each revision session begins with the most challenging topics.
- Revising or studying with the television or radio on in the background is not a good idea.
- Reading is not enough. Making notes will help you to remember.
- Answering questions from past papers, sometimes under exam conditions, is a good way to test learning.
- Don't leave revision until the last minute.

What's the best way for my child to learn?

Revision boils down to personal preference – what works best for each individual. It is not just about reading a textbook. There are many interesting revision methods your child can include in their daily routine. People learn in different ways and revision methods should reflect their preference. You've watched your son/daughter grow up and know their personality. This would give you an idea of what type of learner he/she is. Below are the three main types of learners. You and your child can determine which group he/she belongs to and guide them to the best revision methods to suit.

Visual learners

They prefer using images, pictures, colours, and maps to organize information. The best revision tools may include cue cards, post its, colour coded revision notes, mind maps, drawing pictures and diagrams, highlighting and annotating keywords, facts and definitions.

Auditory learners

They remember better by hearing the information. The best revision tools may include rhymes or mnemonics, reading notes out loud, watching videos, listening to podcasts, recording notes and playing them back.

Kinaesthetic learners

They learn better with practical and hands-on experience. The best revision tools: writing revision notes over and over, creating revision flash cards or using gestures to demonstrate concepts.

What are the common problems pupils face?

- Putting off revision, finding excuses to do other things or leaving all the work until the last minute. The fact is the more you delay, the more likely you are to get into a panic.
- Perhaps the biggest problem surrounding revision and exams is stress. It can make even the most dedicated pupil think they can't remember anything, and even lead to panic attacks.

So how should I help my child to deal with exam stress?

- Encourage them not to be frightened of exam stress, but to see it as a positive thing - after all, it keeps them on their toes mentally, and can help them focus on the task in hand.
- Learn to recognise when they are stressing out, and understand its causes. Often, a break or a chat with someone who knows the pressure they are under will get things into perspective.
- Make sure that they get a good night's sleep before each exam - it will be much easier for them to concentrate during the exam if they are not feeling too tired.
- Encourage them to eat healthily during their revision and exams: plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Bananas are brilliant for brains!
- Avoid caffeine, it makes stress worse and it dehydrates their brains.
- The simplest things often get in the way of starting revision – days can be lost while pupils are 'going to get some folders soon.....' Get around this by providing the files, dividers, wall charts etc. your child will need for the revision period.

A place to study

Most revising will be done at home; having a good environment while studying will help your child stay focused. Ensure that they have a quiet and private place in the home to revise. A simple desk and chair in their room can suffice. Or it can be at the kitchen table. Whatever space it is, make it their private zone at revision time and keep the distractions to a minimum.

Useful equipment

Making sure your child has all the right equipment so he/she can get ready for the exams is also something you could really help with. Some things that your child could find very useful during the revision period:

- Fine-point coloured pens
- Highlighters
- Calculator (scientific)
- Post-it notes
- Note or record cards
- Notebooks
- Calendar
- Access to a computer and printer
- Folders and files
- Revision guides
- Past exam papers
- Textbooks

Keeping motivation up

- Agree the balance between work and social life and stick to the agreement. Again, flexibility is the key – if a special night comes up, agree that they can make up the work at a specified time.
- All pupils fall behind, feel demotivated or overwhelmed, or struggle with the balance of social, work and school demands at times. When your child feels like this, talk to them about the issues, acknowledge their feelings and adopt a sensible attitude in wanting to find a solution.
- Be flexible – use the 80/20 rule. If your child is sticking to what they are supposed to be doing 80% of the time, they will be doing alright.
- Help your child to see their difficulties in perspective. Teenagers often take an all or nothing catastrophic approach to difficulties – “I’ve messed up this essay, I might as well give up.”