

Exam Stress



Stowe Valley
MULTI ACADEMY TRUST



WELLBEING
SOUTHAM COLLEGE



Exams can come with a lot of pressure and can make us feel really stressed. You might feel especially worried because of changes to exams and assessments since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. If you're struggling to cope, you're not alone. External agencies such as MIND and YOUNG MINDS (www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/exam-stress/#Dealingwithexamstress) are there to help you manage your feelings around exams and find ways to cope. You can also reach out to any member of staff in school to talk, where further information, advice and guidance will be signposted to you.

What is exam stress?

Lots of us know what it's like to feel stressed, but it's not easy to describe what stress is. There's no single definition of stress, and it might feel different for you than it does for someone else. It can be perceived differently by us all. How we experience stress can feel different at different times. It can also depend on what's causing it.

Exam stress can be more than feeling nervous on the day of an exam. It can also be how you feel building up to exams, during exams and when waiting for results.

Young people we spoke to described exam stress as:

- "Like a weight placed on top of you. While you want to succeed, I find it really difficult to because of the pressure."
- "Where I'm constantly feeling overwhelmed by the idea of studying or doing the exams and it causes me to lose focus. This lack of focus leads to me feeling like I'm going to fail and adds to the stress - like a snowball effect."
- "Knowing you have so much to do in so little time. Imagining how you know you're going to fail and feeling so stupid because you simply can't remember anything."

Feeling stressed, worried, or under pressure around exams can be difficult to manage. But there are things that can help - it's about finding what's right for you.

Feeling under pressure

You may feel like other people are putting a lot of pressure on you. Or you may be putting pressure on yourself. Expectations and pressure can be hard to manage. If you're struggling, try thinking about the following:

- Where is the pressure is coming from? It might be from yourself, a parent, family member, or carer.
- What could others do to help? Let them know how you're feeling and what you'd like from them, like help with managing revision.
- Am I comparing myself to others? People around us can influence the way we feel about ourselves. Focus on what you can do and believe in your own abilities. For more information, see MINDS page on confidence and self esteem

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What causes exam stress?

- Exams can be stressful on their own, but other things might cause you to feel worse. These might include:
- Feeling like you're not ready or prepared for exams, like leaving revision too late.
- Worrying about how you'll feel and perform during the exam, especially when you don't know what will be in it.
- Pressure from others, like parents, carers, friends or unintentionally the teachers.
- Pressure from yourself to get certain grades.
- Comparing yourself to others, like believing you have to get the same results as your friends.
- Worrying about the future, like getting into university or getting a job.
- Coping with life changes, like moving from secondary school to college.
- Having difficulties at home or in your relationships with family, friends or partners.
- Having caring responsibilities for a family member or someone you live with.
- Coping with physical or mental health problems

You may also feel stressed for reasons that aren't listed here. We're all different and that's okay.

How might exam stress affect me? Exam stress can affect how we feel, think and behave. You might experience different things before, during and after your exams.

Emotions or feelings

- Anxious, worried, overwhelmed
- Upset, teary
- Exhausted
- Defeated, bored, uninterested, fed up
- Frustrated, angry
- Embarrassed, silly, stupid
- Easily annoyed
- Disappointed
- Confused

Physical feelings

- Shaking
- Feeling sick
- Headaches and dizziness
- Stomach pain
- Changes in eating habits
- Crying
- Struggling to concentrate
- Forgetful
- Restless
- Feeling tense in your body
- Changes in breathing, breathing very quickly
- Sweating a lot
- Feeling tired

Thoughts

- Fear of failure
- Fear of disappointing yourself or others
- Comparing yourself to others
- Talking badly to yourself
- Feeling like you can't cope
- Feeling things are pointless
- Doubting yourself
- Believing everything is wrong or bad

Behaviour

- Avoiding things like revision and exam planning
- Struggling to manage day-to-day life
- Lack of motivation
- Not doing things you usually enjoy
- Working too much without taking breaks

When feelings of stress become too much to manage, this can affect our mental health.

Stress can also make existing mental health problems feel harder to cope with. For more information, see the understanding mental health page on the MIND Charity website.