



Supporting the Bailiwicks Young People

EXAM STRESS

Anxiety is normal, it helps us to prepare for stressful situations, it becomes an issue when it begins to get in the way of normal every day activity, sleeping, relationships

Physiology

Both anxiety and stress evoke the same hormonal reaction in the brain, commonly known of as the flight or fight response. Without delivering a biology lesson it's helpful to understand exactly what happens in the brain when a stress response is triggered:

Physical changes in the brain cause a number of reactions in the body, which can feel very unpleasant: They include...

- Feeling shaky, feeling sick or having stomach cramps, or feeling dizzy or faint.
- Breathing fast or finding it hard to breathe,
- Heart beating fast (palpitations), sweating, tense muscles

But anxiety can affect the behaviour and thoughts of the anxious person in negative ways.

These can include...

- Feeling scared, panicky, embarrassed or ashamed a lot of the time.
- Reduced confidence
- Finding it hard to concentrate, or having problems with sleeping or eating.
- Having angry outbursts where the person gets very angry very quickly and feels 'out of control'.
- Worries or negative thoughts going round and round the person's head, or thinking that bad things are going to happen all the time.

Worries about exam work do trigger an anxiety / stress response and can lead to a dip in performance. The anxiety can lead to changes in behaviour and family dynamic, increased stress for parents and a related downward spiral where parental behaviour can have a negative impact on a young person's capacity to cope.

Supporting you child

Listen well – try to identify specific triggers, is the stress consistent, subject specific, time related – a diary can help

Be informed – be engaged in school work and schools expectations and supportive of your child

Be reassuring – let them know you love them whatever the result

Support them to be healthy – encourage children to take regular exercise, sleep well and eat healthily

Support them to be connected – for YP that may be on management of screen time is important to help sleep but disconnecting young people from the digital world creates increased anxiety

Be Mindful – offer support on how to relax, learn more about being in the moment

Find the positives – try to beat unhelpful thinking

Support them to adopt good time management techniques – advice to follow, but I would include in this managing sleeping

For yourself:

- Take care of yourself, acknowledge your own stress and don't blame yourself
- Seek support – you may not be the best person to support your child, step back, are there friends or family that can help
- Take time for yourself
- Be honest with your teenager – the 'that didn't go so well conversation' can be really helpful, reflect and be open how could it go better?

Signs that things are not going so well:

Be ready to accept that your child may need more help

Panic attacks:

Panic attacks are overwhelming feelings of extreme anxiety that come on suddenly and usually last for about ten minutes. During a panic attack the person has difficulties breathing and feels very unwell, overwhelmed and out of control. The feelings gradually calm down and go away usually in about ten minutes but can leave the person feeling shaken and nervous. Having panic attacks can be very frightening, and can affect the child or young person's confidence and hold them back in their ability to go to school and take part in activities.

Obsessions and Compulsions:

Some very anxious people get stuck in a negative cycle of thoughts and behavior's. They can have negative thoughts which are very strong and hard to ignore, (these are called obsessions), and can feel that the only way to stop bad things from happening is to repeat certain actions or check things over and over again (these are called compulsions). If it is severe, this behavior can develop into what is called Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, an anxiety-related disorder.

Links and support: Start with school, a 360 view of what's going for your child on may help you and the staff to give the best support. For face to face early help visit or contact [The Hub](#) on line try [Young Minds](#) or if you want to find out more about [mindfulness](#) try be mindful.