

## How to Fight Exam Anxiety and Emerge as Winners: Tips for Students and Parents

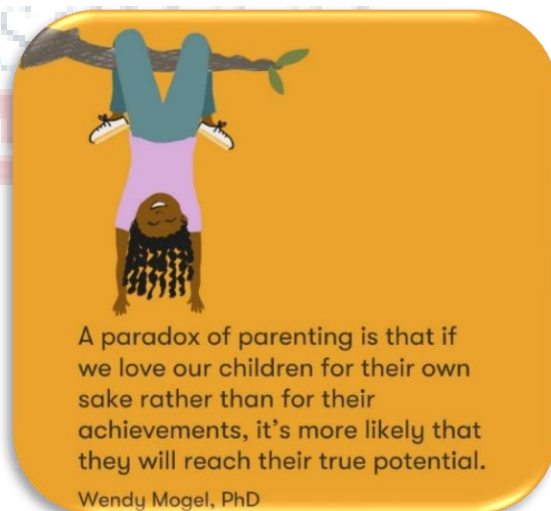


**Examination time** is mostly marked by stress, anxiety, and apprehension for both the students as well as their parents. But think about it, don't you think your child is coping with enough already, do you really want to pass your stress onto them ???

In recent times exam related depression, black outs, suicides have become much more common than they are ever before. It has become important; more of a **necessity** to make sure that parents are in **constant touch** with their children and know what is going on in their lives. With so much at stake the parents have now a huge role to play in their child's life and help them cope with whatever they need help with. It is the need of the hour to keep yourself **calm** in order to be able to do the same for your child. Parents should play an important role in providing **quiet and clean ambience** to study.

### What is exam anxiety?

**Exam anxiety** (also called **performance anxiety**) is a feeling of fear, nervousness, uneasiness, or panic before or during an exam or any testing situation. It interferes with **learning, reduces working memory (or the ability to think spontaneously and make decisions), increases mistakes and lowers test performance**. While your teen may have prepared well for the exam and may have the skills and knowledge to do well, their excessive anxiety may impair their performance in the exam.



While most individuals get nervous before an exam, a few can experience anxiety so debilitating, they find it difficult to concentrate, and struggle to recall the things they have studied. A little nervousness before an exam has actually been found to be productive (famously called the **Yerkes–Dodson law**), making you mentally alert and enhancing your performance. But when that anxiety becomes excessive, it can interfere with test performance. You may know that you know your material, but you could still be unable to recall it because of anxiety, which may make you even more stressed. This may further make it harder for you to focus your attention on the test, and consequently, you may make silly mistakes, not read all the questions, or completely blank out.

As a parent, worrying about your children's state of preparation for the exams is only **the tip of the iceberg**. You are additionally concerned about whether they're taking care of themselves, eating and sleeping regularly, and ensuring that this anxiety ridden time goes as smoothly as possible.

Here are some tips to help you aid your child during this period of stress and anxiety.

**Remember to have compassion and empathy:** Your child is already going through a tough time. Ensure that you are not adding more stress to an already difficult period.

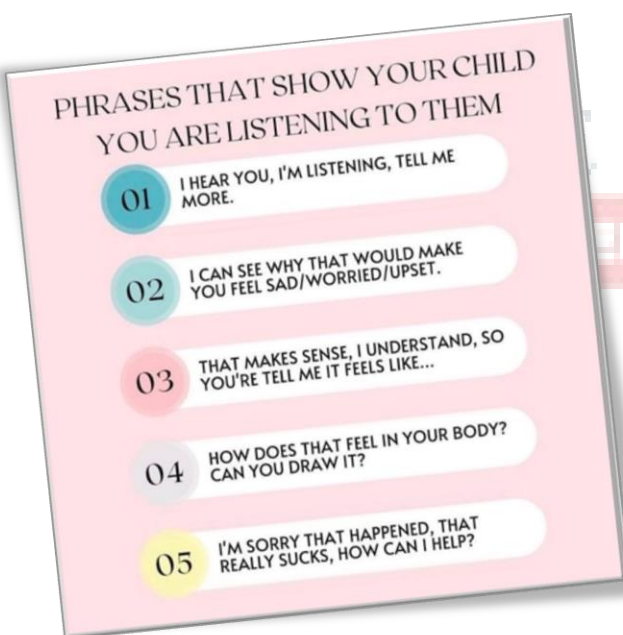
**Recognize your child's effort:** Try to emphasize that these exam times are about putting in the required amounts of hard work and remind them that it is not just about the marks. Relieve some of your child's pressure by ensuring them that bad grades are not the most important, defining factors for their futures. Reminding them that there is more out there can help them feel less anxious about their exams.

**Reinforce the importance of regular sleeping and eating patterns in your child:** Remind your child that while it may feel like sacrificing sleeping and eating times will allow for more

time to study, both sleep and food are necessary to nourish their brain and allow for it to work at its best capacity. Give your children the option of approaching you in case of any doubt or clarification. While you may not be able to provide the solution, just hearing them out will give them a chance to work the problem out verbally. In other cases, a change of perspective may help your children find the solution as required.

**Be their emotional support during this stressful journey:** Let your children know that that you are a safe space for them to emote, vent out and even cry, should the need arise.

**Let go of the smaller issues:** For example, if your child isn't cleaning their room or picking up after themselves during the exam term, it's okay. There are bound to be other things on their mind. Just remember to be there for your children during this trying time in their lives. As long as you do that and follow the tips listed above, the exam period will go by quicker and easier. Also, remember to take breaks and look after yourself. You can't pour from an empty cup.



**TO CONCLUDE;** A parent should act as a facilitator for the child during exams. Remember, the child is already feeling anxious and stressed about their performance in exams. At this juncture, as a parent, you could:

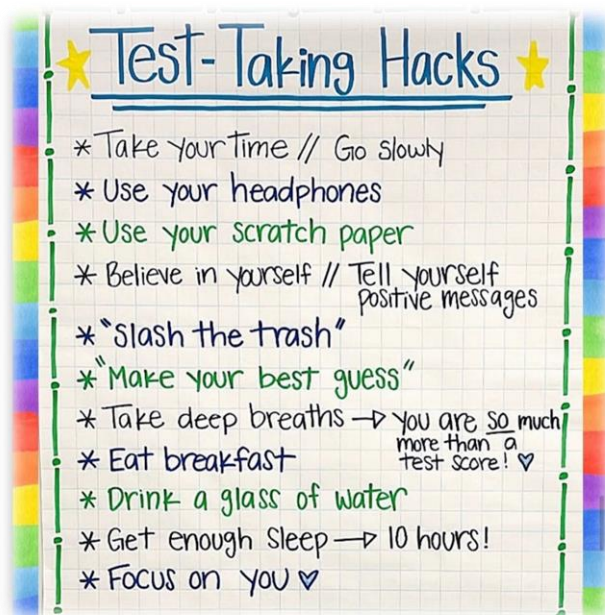
- ✓ Help your child create a study timetable so there is sufficient time to revise the subjects
- ✓ Assist the child in revising the study material
- ✓ Provide adequate and nutritious food to keep them fit and healthy
- ✓ Monitor your child's sleeping pattern and make sure they get adequate rest
- ✓ Provide the much-needed assurance and emotional support for your child to overcome their apprehensions.

As a parent, you will know how your child reacts when they are scared, tense or anxious. Often children talk to parents about their anxieties, frustrations, or their difficulties in coping with studies. Some of the anxieties expressed by children are that they have not adequately prepared, what if they do not get the seat/course they want, inability to concentrate, forgetting everything, not able to grasp the subjects etc. Also, some children tend to oversleep or sleep very little, while some others may have an upset stomach just before exams or may express hopelessness and anxiety about the results. Sometimes due to severe anxiety, students may involve in self harming behaviours also. All these are signs of stress and anxiety due to exams. Being available for the child and monitoring becomes important to keep track of any changes in their behaviour. Reassuring the child that the focus is on learning rather than on marks will calm them to a great extent. It is important to keep your calm and not to induce fear in them.

Students are often fearful of failing to meet their parent's expectations. Teach children that every failure teaches a new lesson, and they should learn to accept failure and move on to do better in life. Parental instinct compels parents to try and protect their children against the things which are making them unhappy. This however can often be manifested in ways which are not necessarily constructive. For example, parents can try to become too involved in the studying process by constantly chivvying on their child to revise, or start to punish them for their surliness and behavioural changes. However, it is important that the **child is prioritised**. Try

to be tolerant and understanding of their mood swings and meltdowns (as much as your nerves can hack it anyway!)

It is necessary to first understand their worries. You don't have to find their exam anxiety stressful personally. Simply be able to sympathise and offer them reassurance. Parents are an essential support network that children can depend on, and this becomes even more prevalent during exam time. Even if you just listen to their anxieties, you will be being helpful.



Taapti

TAAPTI MALHOTRA  
CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST

