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How to ...

How to help your teenagers revise for exams

From avoiding threats and promises to fostering good sleeping habits and banning screens at bedtime

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1 Ask if they need help. Help that's not needed or asked for isn't about their agenda, it's about yours.

2 Do not buy books of revision tips and thrust them in front of your child – it's too late and will just be something else for them to worry about. By all means buy books that help *you* cope with the runup to exams so you don't become another source of stress for them, but keep them hidden.

3 Films can ignite interest in a dusty subject as long as they realise that some artistic licence is used. But also search YouTube for good past TV programmes that cover relevant subjects.

4 **BBC Bitesize** is a brilliant, free online resource: it covers **key stage 1 to GCSE** (40 subjects at GCSE) and encourages a fresh look at a subject. You can pinpoint weak areas, read about them and then be tested online. The great thing about this website is that your child can also go back over the old ground of previous levels if they need to fill in gaps in their knowledge without looking stupid in front of anyone else.

5 Tear (short) articles out of newspapers that are irrelevant to revision but will make them laugh.

6 A whiteboard is a good thing to buy because there's something liberating and fun about them. The fact that what's written on them can easily be rubbed out encourages discussion and silly pictures – great for out-of-context thinking. Get them to teach you (or younger siblings) what they have learned – this is also a good way to find out what they don't fully understand.

7 Try to encourage out-of-context thinking. A child who learns things by heart but doesn't really understand what he's learned won't be able to answer things they weren't expecting.

8 Don't use threats. Teenagers are only too aware that if they fail they may “never get a job” – they don't need more stress. Remember the encouragement you gave them as toddlers when they did the simplest task? Well, don't do that either but be a bit more like that. Encourage the effort they are putting in.

9 Revision can become all about the end goal, so all of you may need to remember that learning for its own sake is also a valid pursuit.

10 Don't promise one big prize at the end of it all, but – if you want to provide incentives – little ones along the way. Although be aware that **Alfie Kohn** (author on several books about education) says “carrots and sticks reduce people's interest in whatever they were rewarded/punished for doing”. That said, something to look forward to never made anyone sad.

11 Provide meals at regular times so they have a routine to build their revision round. Don't be upset if they want to eat while revising if they are on a roll. Vitamin C is said to support the adrenal glands (which take a pounding at stressful times). Don't forget regular water consumption. Some studies show that water aids concentration. Provide a bottle with a straw – they may be teens but everything tastes better through a straw.

12 Sleep is vital to consolidate what's been learned during the day. Make sure your teen gets out into the sunlight – this will help to regulate their body clock. Make sure their

room is pitch black for sleep – light interferes with melatonin production (the hormone needed for sleep) but **blue light – such as that emitted by smartphones and tablets – is especially disruptive** so no screens before sleep for an hour is a good rule for winding down.

13 Spread-out revision is more effective but cramming may be all you have got at this stage. Revision can still be divided into 20-minute bursts with 10-minute breaks.

14 If your child gets stressed, respond to the right hemisphere. This half of the brain governs emotional non-verbal thought (the left deals with order and logic), so don't plough in with practical solutions to an emotional problem. Give them a hug instead and reassure with touch and soothing sounds. You can go on to practical solutions (and appeal to the left side) once they are calm. Equally, if they ask a practical question, don't respond with a "there, there, it'll be OK".

15 If all else fails, exams can be taken again but a child's self-esteem – if shattered – can take years to rebuild. Be nice to them.

Topics