



Activity: Exam Stress Session Plan

Resilience Focus Area: **Education**

Learning Outcomes

- Young people to identify signs of stress, considering when stress is helpful and unhelpful.
- Young people to be able to select and use strategies to help them manage exam stress, including exam preparation and self-care.



Time	Activity	Method	Resources needed
2 mins	WELCOME & LEARNING EXPECTATIONS	Explain to the young people we are working with what the aims and objectives of the session are. Include ground rules and suggested ice-breaker if required.	PowerPoint  Microsoft PowerPoint Presentat PowerPoint Slide 3-4
5 mins	CHECK IN	Ask the group to say how they are feeling from 1-10 and if they want to share why.	PowerPoint Slide 2
10 mins	HELPFUL VS UNHELPFUL STRESS	<p>Ask the group what is stress? Can stress be useful? Discuss. E.g. stress gives us adrenaline and can be useful in certain situations to help motivate us.</p> <p>Ask the group when does stress become too much? Discuss. What happens to our bodies when we get stressed? E.g. headache, butterfly tummy, can't concentrate, shaky. Use flipchart or whiteboardfox.com to draw a body and ask the group to identify where they feel stressed in their body.</p> <p>Encourage the group to draw a timeline / use a virtual timeline, with helpful stress at one end and unhelpful stress at the other and ask them to include examples.</p> <p>Ask the group—does stress help us during exams? Discuss.</p> <p>Ask the group—can stress get in the way of exams? Discuss.</p>	PowerPoint Slide 5-7 Handout Reference:  Microsoft Word Document https://www.bps.org.uk/blogs/dr-funke-baffour/stress-good-bad-and-ugly http://www.ulifeline.org/articles/450-good-stress-bad-stress Flipchart/paper and colourful pens or whiteboardfox.com Exam stress guide (BBC advice)

Time	Activity	Method	Resources needed
5 mins	ACTIVITY WATCH THE RISE ABOVE EXAM STRESS AND TOP TIPS VIDEO	<p>Watch the following Youtube clip as an introduction to exam stress and ways to cope:</p> <p>https://riseabove.org.uk/article/exam-stress/</p> <p><i>There are a number of other clips that could be shown out there, choose one that is best suited to your audience</i></p> <p>Discuss the young people's thoughts from the clip.</p>	<p>PowerPoint Slide 9</p> <p>Laptop</p> <p>YouTube Link</p> <p>Speakers</p>
5 mins	DISCUSSION WHAT IS IT ABOUT TESTS OR EXAMS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL STRESSED?	<p>Ask the group to share some of their fears about tests and exams. Capture these by writing them up on the flipchart / on the screen using whiteboardfox.com or mentimeter.com in a word cloud. Give the group some suggestions, for example: "What if I go blank and don't remember anything?."</p> <p>Give the group further prompts if required with suggestions including: Fear of failure, Pessimism and thinking the worst, Unrealistic expectations, Feeling unprepared, Ending or starting a new schools year or term, Performance anxiety.</p> <p>Display what the group have said.</p>	<p>PowerPoint Slide 10</p> <p>Share the screen using whiteboardfox.com or menti.com</p> <p>Or Flipchart / pens</p>
5 mins	ACTIVITY WATCH THE STRESS BUCKET VIDEO	<p>Watch the YouTube clip:</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZxflZX9wo</p> <p><i>There are a number of other clips that could be shown out there, choose one that is best suited to your audience</i></p> <p>Discuss the young people's thoughts from the clip.</p>	<p>PowerPoint Slide 11</p> <p>Laptop</p> <p>YouTube Link</p> <p>Speakers</p>

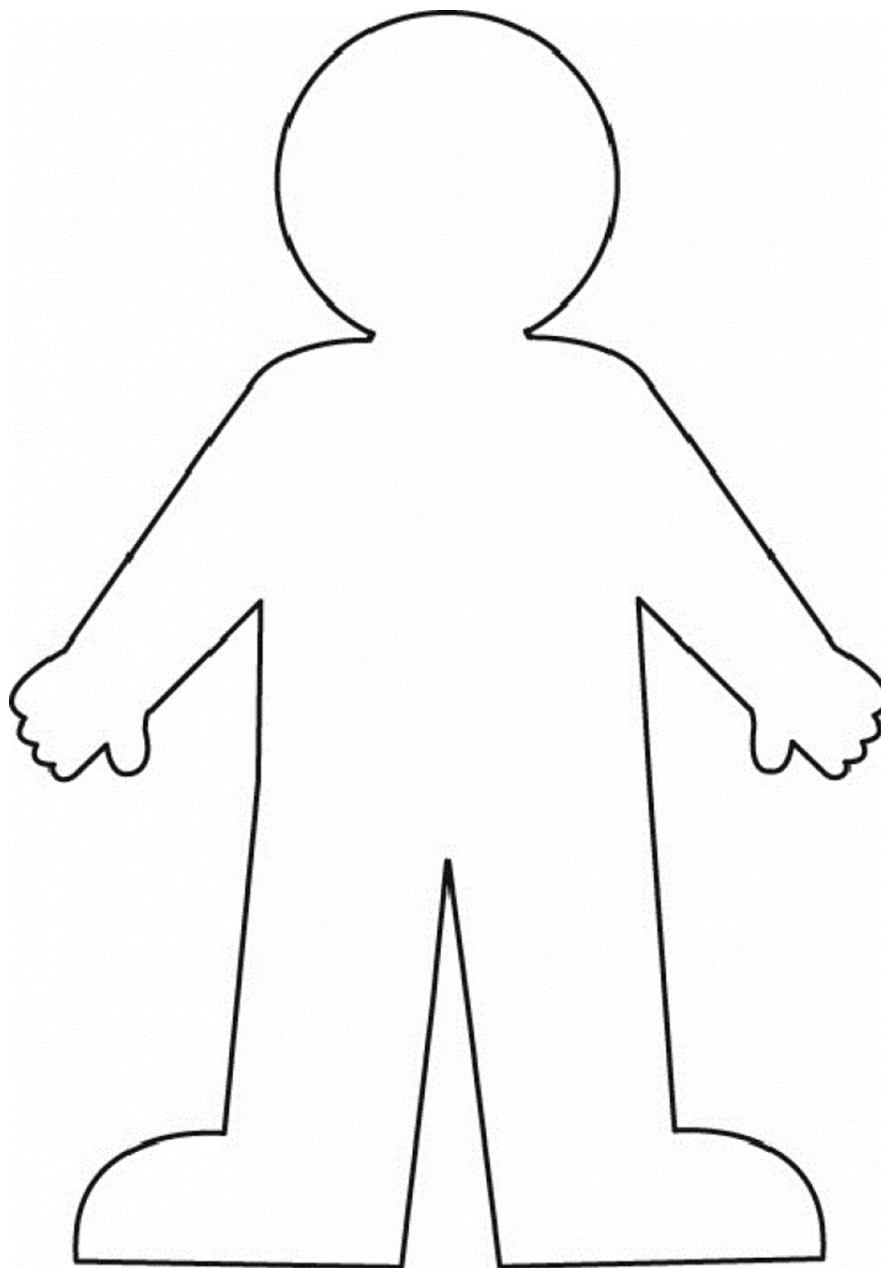
Time	Activity	Method	Resources needed
10 mins	<p>DISCUSSION</p> <p>WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU COULD DO TO HELP YOU PREPARE FOR TESTS & EXAMS?</p>	<p>Ask the group to reflect on what they currently do that helps. On flipchart (or virtually using whiteboardfox or menti) capture all of their suggestions. Perhaps share some suggestions with them. For example:</p> <p>Helpful things to tell yourself e.g. <i>I tried my best, I did well last time, I have revised and I know this topic, I can plan what I will do</i></p> <p>Create a timetable, Use revision techniques, Enjoy social time, Get enough sleep, Eat healthily, Be aware of conflict with others, Practice, Work with someone who also has a test or exam, Take breaks – every 25 minutes, Use flashcards, Use visual diagrams, Read your notes aloud (in funny voices) and then test yourself, Speak to your teacher. Discuss with the group what has worked for them. Count up the most popular suggestions.</p> <p>Talk about how they prepare leading up to the day of the test / exam. Ask the group if they think about these ideas:</p> <p>Make sure you know when and where the exam is taking place, Plan your route and allow yourself plenty of time, Set the alarm, Pack all of your equipment – pens, notes and bottles of water and snacks, Do some breathing techniques.</p>	<p>PowerPoint Slide 12—16</p> <p>Whiteboardfox.com or menti.com</p> <p>Or Flipchart / pens</p>
10 mins	<p>LOOKING AFTER OURSELVES DURING EXAMS AND WHEN WE GET THE RESULTS</p>	<p>Young people to think about who their support networks are during exams and during results i.e. school, home, peers, community etc.</p> <p>Young people to feedback any coping tips during exams and during results.</p> <p>Examples: Don't bottle up feelings, talk to someone or write a journal. Childline has coping with exam stress examples https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-results/ and Kooth.com online counselling can be promoted.</p> <p>Make a plan – consider what will happen if you do get the results you wanted, and what might happen if you don't so you're not panicking on the day! Plan something nice to do with friends or family later in the day so that you have it to look forward to regardless of what happens.</p>	<p>PowerPoint Slide 17</p> <p>Share with the group: https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-results/</p> <p>https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/</p> <p>Www.kooth.com</p> <p>Breathing exercise cards</p> <p>Self care suggestions</p>

Time	Activity	Method	Resources needed
	LOOKING AFTER OURSELVES DURING EXAMS AND WHEN WE GET THE RESULTS Continued....	Get plenty of rest – this will put you in a good frame of mind before results day. Social media – how can social media help, or not help us when we have received results?	
5 mins	RECAP AND CLOSE	Remind the group: REMEMBER you cannot reduce all stress, but you can better manage it! The test or exam results will tell you something, but they will not tell you everything. There are many ways of being smart. You are smart! SO while you are preparing for the test and in the midst of it all, remember there is no way to 'test' all of the amazing and awesome things that make you, YOU! Check-out with the group.	PowerPoint Slide 18—23 (inc. resources as handouts)



To access more resources, information
and advice visit
www.HeadStartKent.org.uk





EXAM STRESS (TAKEN FROM BBC ADVICE)

Everyone gets stressed during exams but it's important not to let it get out of control. Don't lose sight of the fact that there is life after exams.

A **little bit of stress** can be a good thing as it motivates us to knuckle down and work hard. But exams can make stress levels get out of hand, which can stop us from performing our best, so it's important to address it and get it back under control.

Stress Symptoms

Look out for prolonged or extreme cases of the following *if you feel the work's piling up*:

- Difficulty getting to sleep or difficulty waking up in the morning, or constant tiredness
- Forgetfulness
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Poor appetite
- Loss of interest in activities
- Increased anxiety and irritability
- Increased heart rate
- Migraines/headaches
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness

If you've noticed **three or more** of the above symptoms and you've experienced them for a few weeks you may need to do something about your stress levels.



How to manage exam stress

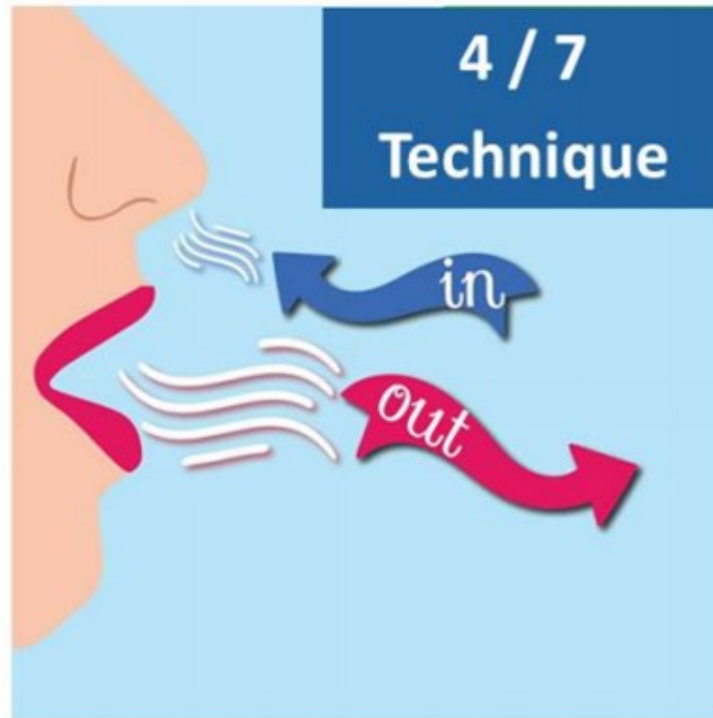
- Learn to recognise when you're stressing out. A break or a chat with someone who knows the pressure you're under will get things into perspective.
- Avoid comparing your abilities with your mates. Those "Oh my God I've only read Macbeth 17 times" conversations are such a wind up. Everyone approaches revision in different ways, so just make sure you've chosen the method that works best for you. Make a realistic timetable. Stick to it.
- Eat right. Treat yourself like a well honed machine - eat fresh fruit and veg and have a proper breakfasts. Fuel your brain as well as your body - no one can think straight on coffee and chocolate.
- Sleep well. Wind down before bed and don't revise under the duvet - your bed is a sanctuary, not a desk. Get your eight hours.
- Exercise. Nothing de-stresses the mind faster than physical activity, so build it into your timetable. Being a sloth makes our mind sloppy too.
- Panic is often triggered by hyperventilating (quick, shallow breaths). So if you feel yourself losing it during the exam, sit back for a moment and control your breathing. Deep breath in and out through the nose, counting to five each way.
- Steer clear of any exam 'post-mortem'. It doesn't matter what your mate wrote for Question 3(b), it's too late to go back and change your answers, so it will just make you worry even more.
- Ultimately, don't lose sight of the fact that there is life after exams. Things might seem intense right now, but it won't last forever.



BBC Advice fact files are here to help young people with a broad range of issues. They're based on advice from medical professionals, government bodies, charities and other relevant groups.



Breathing exercises: 4-7 Technique



Breath in
through your
nose for 4
counts

Breath out
through your
mouth for 7
counts



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Body Scan Technique



Start at the top of your body
Focus on each different part of your body and your muscles to make yourself aware of them. If they feel tight or uncomfortable try to consciously relax them.

Face – are you frowning? is your jaw locked?
Shoulders and back – are they tight or tense?
Arms- Are they crossed or locked?
Hands – Are they open or closed?
Continue doing this down your body to your feet
then go back the other direction from your feet to
your head to check everything is still as relaxed as
possible.



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Exam Self-Care (taken from <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/exam-self-care/>)



Five minutes

Try a grounding exercise. Grab a (non-academic!) book or sheet of paper and count how many letters there are on the page, or count or many blue things you can see in the room. These types of exercises help to reduce anxiety by focusing your brain on a specific task that is unrelated to your work.

Another grounding exercise is the 54321 trick. You need to find:

5 things you can see

4 things you can touch

Fifteen minutes

- Find a YouTube video that makes you smile - I recommend dogs on trampolines and waterslides for this purpose.
- Make a hot drink, but don't take it back to your desk with you. Drink it away from your work space and turn it into a short mindfulness exercise - notice how the mug feels warm in your hands, but cools down gently, and the way the liquid feels when you take a sip. Try to bring your mind back to it if you find yourself going back into revision-mode before your break is over!
- Do something creative, like drawing, colouring or printing off funny pictures to stick on your noticeboard. You could even try to learn a new skill.

An hour

- Have a shower with a shower gel or soap that smells really good. You could try a lavender-scented shower gel or moisturiser, a smell many people find calming, so that the smell lingers for a while.
- Do something involving nature. Go for a walk, sit in the garden or buy a plant.

Connect with other humans. Find somebody who also needs a break and have a chat with them – you might be able to help each other get through the exam period. It's easy to feel isolated when you're doing exams, so make time to connect with your friends.

In general

- It sounds obvious, but make sure you're drinking enough water and eating regular meals - it can be tempting to eat at your desk to maximise study time, but you'll work more effectively if you use meal times as a way to get away from your study space.
- Remember that everybody has different study patterns and energy levels, so try not to worry that you're not doing enough work. Keep in mind that people might exaggerate the amount of time they claim to be working for!
- If you're struggling to manage your mood or anxiety levels, don't keep it to yourself. Friends and family members can be a great source of support, and there's no shame in seeking professional help. YoungMinds have plenty of information about how to get support for your mental health, so you don't need to suffer in silence.
- Above all, remember that exams aren't everything. There are many options that don't rely on getting the top grades and in ten years' time, most people won't care or notice what grades you got when you were younger. You are not defined by your exam results - you are so much more than the letters that appear on a sheet of paper.

Exam checklist (taken from HeadStart Newham Exam Stress Toolkit):

- ◇ I know the dates of all the exams I am taking
- ◇ I know which topics will come up in each exam
- ◇ I have a revision plan that will work for me
- ◇ I know the best way of revising for me
- ◇ I have an idea of where I would like to be next year
- ◇ I have applied to do this
- ◇ I have a plan B in case this doesn't work out
- ◇ I have someone at home who knows about school
- ◇ My friends are supportive and positive influences
- ◇ I eat well
- ◇ I sleep well
- ◇ I do exercise
- ◇ I know how to manage anxiety
- ◇ I know how to de-stress

Further resources...

WEBSITES

SAVE THE STUDENT offer 8 tips on dealing with exam stress: <https://www.savethestudent.org/extra-guides/top-tips-to-beat-the-exam-stress.html>

YOUNG MINDS offer great advice and tips on dealing with exam stress: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/exam-stress/#:~:text=Dealing%20with%20exam%20stress,your%20sleeping%20or%20eating%20habits>

CALM advice for students dealing with exam stress: <https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/exam-stress/>

BBC BITESIZE suggestions: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zsvcqhvh>

CHILDLINE offer masses of great advice and tips including the additional effects of exam stress: <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-stress/>

And a great colourful booklet: <https://www.highdown.reading.sch.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=1802&type=pdf>

MIND offer 14 practical tips that help beat exam stress: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/14-ways-to-beat-exam-stress/>

THE MIX has facts and tips to deal with exam stress: <https://www.themix.org.uk/work-and-study/study-and-exam-tips/exam-stress-1241.html>

VIDEOS

BBC BITESIZE videos on top tips, advice and handling exam day: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zsvcqhvh>

RISE ABOVE dealing with exam stress: <https://youtu.be/mjpnMykgjxs>

THE 4.01 SHOW how to ace exams: <https://youtu.be/O7W2yMxWaJk>

THE 4.01 SHOW celebrities talk about stress in general, as well as exam stress, and how they deal with it - <https://youtu.be/1ZJqP2GeWc8>