Exam Stress Plan

A practical one-page guide for students and parents

The Meeting Matters
Psychology & mental health since 2010

1 Weeks before

- Make a timetable that includes meals, sleep, exercise and rest.
- Start with your hardest subject while your mind is fresh.
- Study 30 to 45 minutes, then a 5 to 10 minute break. Phone out of reach.
- One lighter day each week. A plan you can follow beats a perfect plan you drop.

2 Study smarter

- Test yourself: close the book and recall the main points.
- Do past papers against the clock.
- Explain a topic out loud, as if teaching a friend.
- Revisit older topics every few days. Make a one-page summary per subject.

3 Protect your sleep

- Teenagers usually need about 8 to 10 hours.
- Keep a regular bedtime. No screens for an hour before sleep.
- Avoid late caffeine and energy drinks.
- Cannot sleep from worry? Write it on paper: "I will deal with this tomorrow."

4 Worrying thoughts

- "I will fail" is a prediction, not a fact.
- Ask: what is the evidence? What would I tell a friend?
- What is one small step I can take now?
- Keep a 15 minute "worry time" each day. Outside it, note the worry and return to work.



Two-minute calming breath

- Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 counts.
- Repeat for two minutes. Drop your shoulders and unclench your jaw.
- Practise on ordinary days so it is easy to use when your heart is racing or your mind goes blank.

5 Night before and exam day

- Pack your bag. Check the time and place.
- Light revision of your one-page notes, then stop.
- Eat normally, drink water, sleep on time.
- Read the whole paper first. Start with what you know. Watch the clock.
- Blank mind? Pen down, three slow breaths, move to another question.

6 For parents

- Listen first. Ask how they are feeling.
- Do not compare with cousins or classmates.
- Praise effort, not only marks.
- Keep home calm, with regular meals and quiet time to study.

When to ask for help

- Worry stays strong for weeks, or sleep and appetite change.
- Panic attacks, constant headaches or stomach aches, or not wanting to go to school.
- Withdrawal, or talk of hopelessness or harming oneself: reach out to a psychologist or doctor straight away. If anyone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services or go to the nearest hospital.