



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

How to curb last minute exam nerves

It is that time of year again when the dreaded four letter word EXAM has come around. With state examinations starting next week, even young people who have studied hard all year and prepared themselves in every subject, can still find themselves hit with a wave of panic on the morning of the first exam. Butterflies hit their stomach and their minds become full of negative thoughts such as 'I'm going to fail', 'I won't remember anything' or 'my mind is blank'.

While it is natural to feel nervous before an exam and sometimes even helpful to motivate us to achieve; getting excessively anxious can be costly as it can reduce the young person's ability to focus and sometimes even cause them to forget information that they studied.

The quickest and most effective way of dealing with feelings of panic and anxiety is to take several slow deep breaths. Deep breathing can reduce anxiety and panic, as well as increasing energy levels and stopping racing thoughts. Teach your child deep breathing so that they can use it before, during and after the exam if needed. Also if your child is visual, encourage them to see themselves sitting in the exam hall calm and confident. Prepared for the exam. Knowing they have put the work in.

Words of encouragement can also help. Remind them that they have studied the material and that they can do it.

Preparing them for the exam itself can be helpful. Talk to them about what to do during the test. Encourage them to read the paper carefully and to take their time when reading. Young people often become panicky when they see a question they don't know the answer to or where they do know the answer but their mind has gone blank. If this happens the best thing they can do is to take slow deep breaths. Remember panicking just makes it harder to recall information. By becoming calmer they can remember information more clearly; if they still cannot recall the information encourage them to move onto the next question and return to this question later.

From a practical point of view, if your child suffers from exam panic, remember that preparation can help to calm their nerves. Providing them with all the essentials on the day of the exam by making sure they have gotten a good night's sleep, eating a healthy breakfast in the morning and have all their supplies -- such as pens, paper and a calculator -- packed and ready to go.

Finally, hold your tongue!! This is not the time to point out they have not spent enough time studying. The best way to keep them calm is to remain calm yourself.

Good Luck!!

Clare Crowley Collier, Therapist, Educator & Facilitator for Teenagers and Parents



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