

2020 EDITION

The Parents' Guide to: Homelife & Study
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THE PARENTS GUIDE TO

HOMELIFE & STUDY

The Parents' Guide to provides parents with the information they need to help their teenage children make the right choices to create successful futures after GCSE and sixth form.

Our online guides are designed to inform, involve and guide parental support. They include the most up to date information on topics such as apprenticeships, universities and revision techniques.

Wherever we refer to 'parents' we mean 'parents and carers.' This includes grandparents, older siblings or any other person with significant caring responsibilities for children.

This guide has been produced to support parents and schools during the coronavirus outbreak. We give practical advice; however we are not medical professionals and you should seek expert advice if needed. We make recommendations of what we believe to be reliable sources to help you find further information but these organisations have not endorsed this guide.

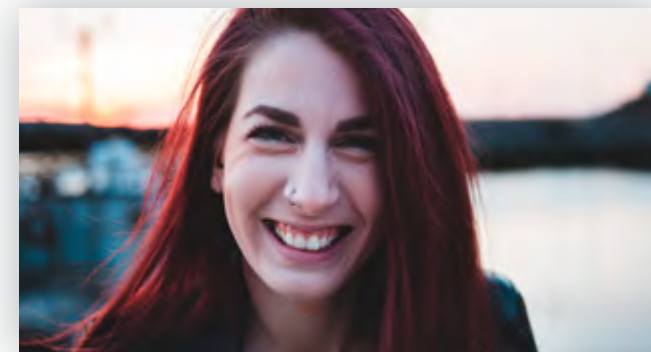
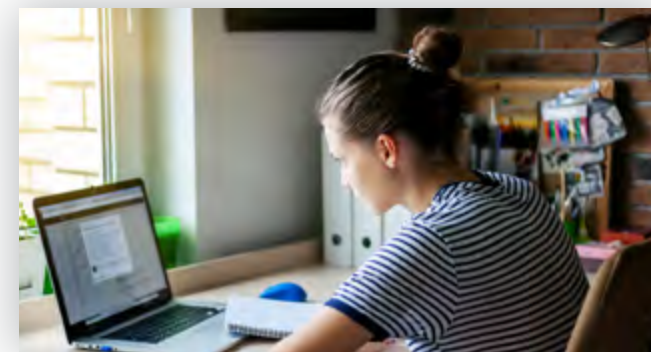
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Introduction

Homelife can have a huge impact on your child's success with their studies and this guide gives some pointers of things you can do to make a positive difference. We've included a few obvious reminders, but also some things you may not have thought of or didn't realise could be so important.

2020 has been a remarkable year and many parents, after months of home schooling, have renewed admiration for what a fantastic job teachers do. September's return to school, albeit with different rules and processes than before, has mostly been welcomed by parents and children alike. It's felt comforting to return to familiar routines and reassuring that students' education is back on track.

However, it seems we're not out of the woods yet, and whilst Coronavirus infection rates have reduced since lockdown, the threat of a second wave is ominous. So now, more than ever, you'll want to make sure your child is as physically and mentally healthy as they can be. An excellent immune system helps prevent illness and speeds recovery if your child does get sick, building resilience helps combat stress and makes coping with challenges easier, and a safe haven at home makes it a secure and comforting place to be.

Read on to find out what you can do to make your child's homelife the supportive infrastructure they need.

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Our range of interactive guides provide you with easy to follow advice, hyperlinks to reliable sources and the most up-to-date information.

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Browse through our collection of online articles covering a range of topics from supporting your child with their revision to helping them apply to university through UCAS.

Parent Q&A

Almost every parent has questions about their child's education. Read through answers to commonly asked questions or ask your own.

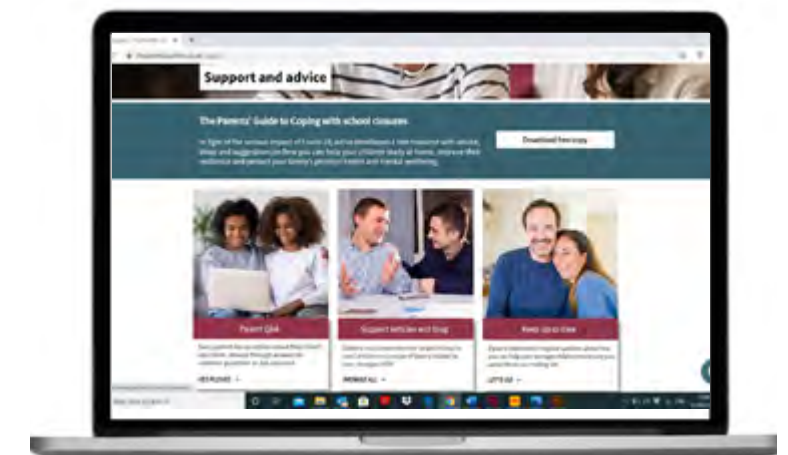
Blog

Our blog provides reliable and timely advice and support to changes taking place across UK schools and colleges.

Parent newsletter

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How to boost your child's immune system

Being run-down means that our immune system is not as effective as it could be and it makes all of us more likely to pick up infections. There are some simple steps you can take to improve your child (and family's) immune system, and here are our top six tips.

1. Sleep

Sleep is an essential element for optimum health, so make sure your child is getting enough rest. Teenagers need a lot of sleep given the huge changes taking place in their bodies – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night. Tempting though it may be for them to stay up late (whether studying or binge-watching box sets into the small hours), they will be much better off settling down for an early night. This could prove tricky if they don't

have a specific reason to get up in the morning with no school, so make sure you keep them in a healthy routine and not allow them to stay up late into the night and sleep in long into the morning. Work backwards! If they should get up at 7.00 am, then need to be asleep by 11.00 pm at the latest – which probably means being in bed much earlier.

Be firm about bedtime when they're in their mid-teens (or younger). At this stage you can insist they go to bed at the right time which should encourage them to stick to a similar routine when they reach their late teens when it's not so easy for you to tell them what to do. Even if they are not asleep, being in bed in a calm environment (without looking at their phones) will help to relax the body. It's a difficult rule to enforce as your teens get older, but you can certainly encourage them to do the right thing.

Mobiles, screens and sleep

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by ready access to a 24/7 online community via their phones. You think it's lights out, but they're on the phone under the duvet long after you've gone to bed. The simplest answer is to remove their phones overnight, but this doesn't teach them self-discipline. Do minimise the number of screens they have in the bedroom, encourage them to have at least 30 mins screen-free time before

settling down to sleep and get them to use night screen settings in the evening to reduce glare (white light on bright screens prevent sleepiness).

Phones should be set to silent at bedtime so that sleep is not interrupted by regular pinging with alerts and messages – if they have one, using the phone's Do Not Disturb setting is an easy way to do this automatically.

TRY TO GIVE YOUR CHILD AT LEAST 30 MINS SCREEN-FREE TIME BEFORE BED



A bedtime routine

Creating a “bedtime” routine, such as switching the phone to silent, putting it away 30 minutes before bed, taking a bath, having a hot drink and dimming the lights can all help calm the mind and prepare it for sleep. Sticking to a similar routine every night signals to the body that it is time for bed and helps it switch off so try to get your child into the habit of doing the same things before bed and going to sleep at a similar time. Encourage them to keep this up, because it also acts as a trigger to reduce anxiety.

If your children share a room, curtaining off their sleeping area helps give them some personal space.

Avoid lie-ins

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning and, hard though it may

be, try to limit lie-ins at the weekend to just an extra hour or so in bed. Long lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at an appropriate time on Sunday night and consequently, making it harder for them to wake up on time on Monday mornings.

Be consistent

Where possible, bedtimes and get-up times should be similar from one day to the next allowing the body to synch to a regular cycle. Make plans for mornings so they have a reason to get up. As they are not going to school (either through school closures or holidays) then try and get them to stick to healthy waking and sleeping times. Don't allow them to get into bad habits by sleeping in all morning – this will be a hard habit to break once it's formed.

Sleep Council
Blog



2. Eating

Food is fuel for the body, so making sure they eat at regular intervals with plenty of healthy ingredients is vital. Try to ensure they have a healthy breakfast (even if it is only cereal), a good lunch and a nutritious supper in the evening. Where you can, prepare fresh food and give them a “rainbow diet”, including all the colours of the rainbow throughout the week; this naturally ensures they are getting the right balance of vitamins and minerals.

A balanced diet

As well as their “five a day” (about a third of the overall diet), everyone should have some starchy carbohydrate (another third), and the remaining third split between protein and milk/dairy with a small amount of fat. Ensure vegetarians and vegans are getting enough protein with plenty of protein rich vegetables (such as peas, sprouts, sweet corn, asparagus, broccoli and avocado) as well as nuts, pulses and beans.

Good food choices to maximise concentration include green leafy vegetables, herbs, oily fish and pulses so try to include these as a regular part of their diet – it will be good for the whole family too! Fresh food is a better alternative to pre-prepared foods and will help you avoid panic buying large quantities of long-life items that are packed with salt and preservatives.

Eating regularly

It's important that teenagers eat at regular intervals to avoid peaks and dips in energy levels. Breakfast, lunch and dinner should be punctuated with healthy snacks. Be careful at home that they are sticking to regular mealtimes and not just snacking continuously throughout the day. If possible, sit down for a family meal together at the end of each day (mobile and tablet free!). Not only is this a fantastic lifestyle habit for them to take through to adulthood, it will also provide a break from being online and a chance to chat and share one another's experiences that day.



Snacking

The temptation to eat sugary, highly salted, unhealthy snacks to keep energy levels up is not only bad for overall health but can negatively impair their performance and ability to concentrate. Help them make the right choices when they are in a hurry by providing them with healthy alternatives, such as fruit, nuts, yogurts, smoothies and healthy snack bars. If chocolate is a must, swap milk chocolate for dark chocolate. This doesn't mean they can't have an occasional treat, but it's better to avoid eating high sugar and salty foods too often. The foods you have available in your house, and what you eat,

will influence your child's choices, so make sure you have the right options at home.

As your teenagers are growing up and getting more independent, they will be preparing food for themselves and it's not possible for you to watch what they are eating every meal time. Remember, they are going to eat what you have available in the house, so if your fridge, freezer and cupboards are full of good options, that's what they'll reach for when they're hungry.

Fast food, sweets, crisps and other treats are absolutely fine, so long as they are a small part of an overall diet and not the staple foods.

KEEP THE HOUSE STOCKED WITH PLENTY OF HEALTHY SNACKS



Cook together

Whilst it may not be possible every night, it’s great if you can include some home-cooked meals (from scratch) regularly throughout the week. Not only is this much healthier and cheaper than buying ready-meals and takeaways, it’s one of the best lifestyle habits to teach your child which they’ll benefit from throughout their adult life.

Cooking together provides a very good opportunity to spend time together and bond. It’s a non-pressurized space for them to talk to you about things that may be troubling them without making it the central focus – you can catch up on good news too. It gives you a chance to show them how to cook well-balanced food and gives them life skills to take when they leave home (whether that’s to go to work or go on to further education). It also means that, with enough practise, they’ll be able to create a family dinner, so the pressure isn’t all on you. As well as learning (or improving) a new skill, lots of us find cooking fun, and it’s lovely to share home-cooked dishes, so it’s a good way to pass time if spending a lot of time at home.

Healthy snacks shopping list:

- Mixed nuts
- Raisins
- Yoghurt
- Fruit
- Dried fruit
- Popcorn
- Rice cakes
- Flapjacks
- Dark chocolate
- Carrot sticks
- Cottage cheese
- Kale chips
- Hummus
- Eggs
- Smoothies
- Olives
- Peanut butter
- Avocado
- Tuna

BBC
Good Food

Jamie Oliver
Recipes

NHS
Eatwell guide

Tesco
Budget recipes

COOKING TOGETHER IS A GREAT WAY TO PASS TIME WHILST STAYING INDOORS



3. Hydration

The teenage body is made up of around 60% water. Not drinking enough water reduces productivity, both mentally and physically, and symptoms can include tiredness, confusion, reduced energy levels and the temptation to snack when not actually hungry (thirst is often mistaken for hunger).

Have water on hand at all times

The best way to make sure your child is drinking enough is to ensure they have water on hand at all times – at their desk, in bottles in their bag when on the go, and served alongside food. Plain water is ideal, but to add interest, use natural ingredients to give flavour – such as cucumber, lemon, lime, orange, tangerine, mint or ginger.

Other drinks

Natural fruit juices are great, but can be high in natural sugar, so why not dilute them? Herbal teas or honey with a dash of lemon offer hot, caffeine free alternatives. Limit your child's fizzy drink intake – whether calorie controlled or not, including energy drinks. They are all unhealthy if drunk in large quantities.

Eight glasses a day

Health experts recommend drinking at least two litres of water a day. This equates to roughly eight 250ml glasses.



Alcohol

Alcohol can damage the immune system, reducing the body's ability to protect itself against infection or fight off infection if compromised. Try to encourage your teen to stay alcohol free. If they must drink, an occasional beer or glass of wine with food is fine, with the emphasis on occasional and just one.

**DRINK PLENTY OF WATER
THROUGHOUT THE DAY**



NHS
Live Well

**British Nutrition
Foundation**

Caffeine intake

Watch their caffeine intake

Caffeine is present in coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate so keep an eye on how much of these your child consumes. On average, adults shouldn't consume more than 400mg of caffeine a day and adolescents should have much less.

Energy shots are often very high in caffeine and a firm favourite with teens. Drinks with high caffeine (more than 150mg per litre) need to show this on the label, although it is not always clear – and it doesn't apply to drinks bought in coffee shops. Many energy drinks don't necessarily have huge percentages of caffeine, but they are served in large volumes (half litre cans/bottles) so the amount of caffeine your child is drinking is a lot, whereas a small glass of the same product would be fine.

Lots of products high in caffeine are available in health food shops which can give the impression that they're good for wellbeing but, like many things, can be harmful if taken in large quantities.

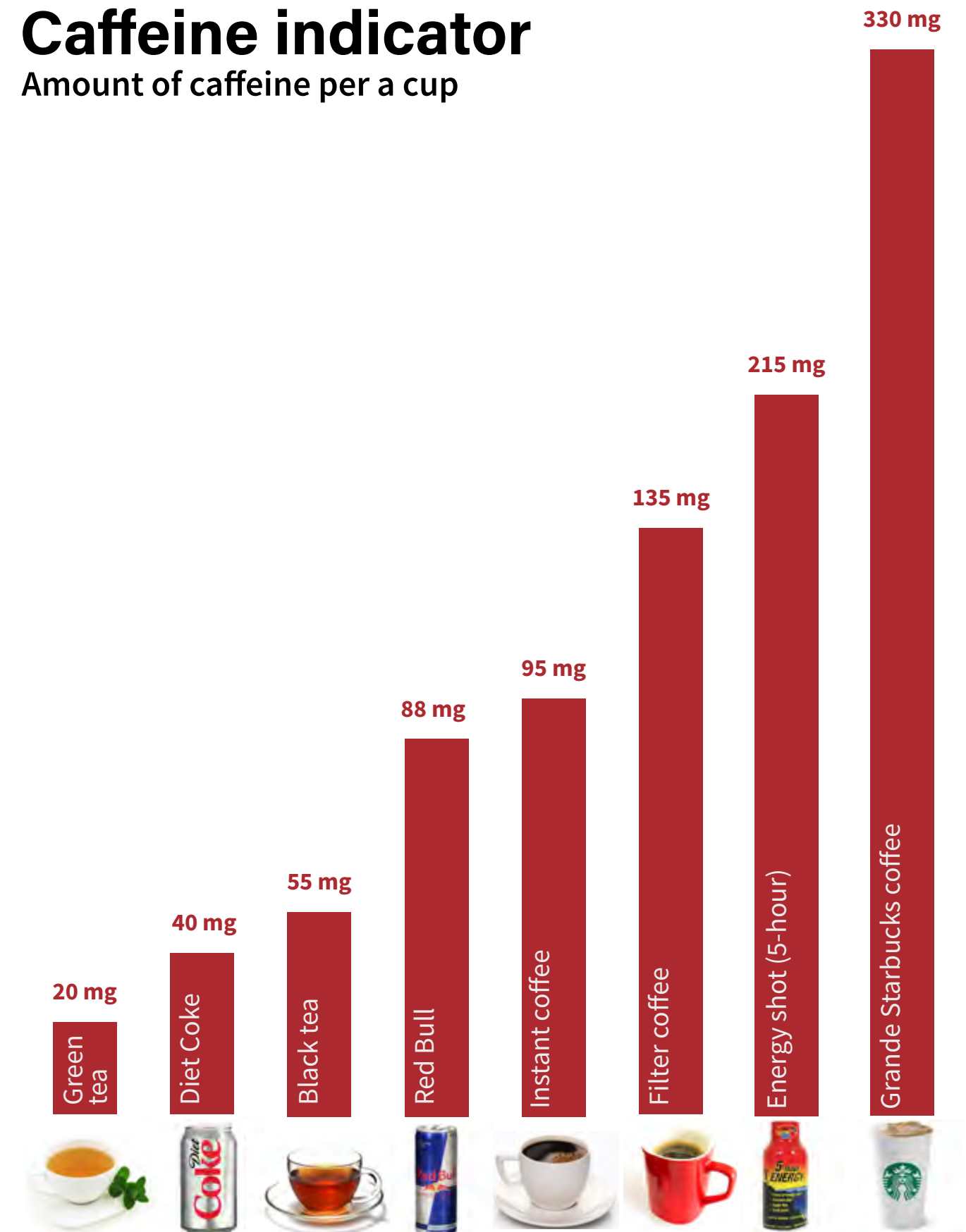
Effects of caffeine

Caffeine affects us in different ways, and different people are more sensitive to it than others. Too much caffeine can result in loss of sleep, loss of energy, low mood and low concentration – the opposite of what's needed to study well. Caffeine is also long lasting, so drinking caffeine-high drinks (or eating high caffeine foods) in the afternoon can still impact on your child's ability to sleep that night. If possible, get them to avoid it completely from lunchtime as a year-round rule.



Caffeine indicator

Amount of caffeine per a cup





4. Being active

Being active is a key component in healthy living – both for mental and physical health. At present, we are allowed to go out once each day to take some exercise. Do try to ensure your children make the most of this, especially as we are enjoying some nice weather at the moment. It will ensure they are getting out in nature, taking a break from being online and getting some exercise. Active hobbies release “happy” hormones that are fantastic for regulating mood, promoting self-confidence and reducing stress.

This is especially important if they are home schooling. Schools are very mindful about ensuring a balance of physical activities mixed in with academic studies

and, particularly if your child is not inclined to be active, being at home could prove an excuse for stopping all exercise. Try not to let this happen, even if they are just going out for a walk. Of course, lots of group activities have been suspended (park runs, swimming, team sports etc) so there are limitations on what they can do, but try to ensure they are not spending all day, every day sitting indoors and not getting outside.

Of course, this does not apply if they suspect they have coronavirus. In that case, they absolutely cannot go out (not even for a walk) but, if you have a garden, they can go outside (although not with other family members).

Darebee
Workout
database

**Make your
body work**

YOUTUBE
channels e.g.
The Body Coach

FIIT
Free and paid
online classes

5. Good hygiene

The message about properly washing your hands can't be missed with the coronavirus and it's an important thing to do in maintaining overall good health, so be sure they wash their hand whenever they come in from outside and always before preparing or eating food (*see page 7 for more info*).

In addition, make sure your children are following these basic steps:

1. taking a daily shower;
2. washing their hair with shampoo (at least weekly);

3. cleaning their teeth daily for two minutes, at least in the morning and before bed, but more frequently if possible – and flossing regularly; and
4. wearing clean clothes.

Make sure towels and bed linen are changed regularly so they are always fresh and clean. If one of your family gets coronavirus (or other infection), do not allow them to share towels. Where possible, dry washing outside in the sunshine, as this is a better way to kill bacteria than drying them in the home or tumble dryer.

Help your child study at home

Finding the right space

Hopefully they will already have an appropriate place to study, but if it's a shared space and there are lots of you working / studying at home, help them find a calm space to study. Things to consider are noise levels, lighting, ability to store their papers tidily, and not being disturbed by other family members (especially if sharing a bedroom and lots of the family are forced to stay at home).

People have different needs, for some, background music is helpful to studying, for others it's a distraction so try to have zones in the house for noise and zones for quiet. Earbuds are great if two children are sharing the same space and one wants to listen to music and the other doesn't. Bear in mind visual distractions too. Don't have televisions playing in every room all day. Different locations can help some children, so rather than always working in their bedroom, they

might like to use the dining room, or living area from time to time. Give your child space to find out what works best for them.

Bedroom

A calm environment can encourage sleep, so make sure their room is a comfortable temperature; their linen is fresh, clean and cosy; they have black-out blinds/curtains to reduce light in summertime (or eyeshades if that's not possible) and that it is quiet.

Of course, you can't be responsible for whether or not they keep their room tidy (although you can try to encourage it) but it is proven that a calm, uncluttered environment helps relaxation. If they have their own room, try to allow them to keep this as personal space, avoid going into their rooms to chat or catch up, save that for when the family is in shared spaces.

**GCSE revision
guides**

**Sixth form
revision
guides**

**WORK WITH YOUR CHILD TO
FIND A CALM SPACE TO
REVISE**



Taking a break

It's vital for effective study and mental wellbeing that your child takes regular breaks (both long and short) – without feeling guilty!

Short breaks

When helping them create a homework or study timetable, ensure they factor in five or ten minute breaks within 30 or 60 minute study sessions. Short bursts of studying produce much better results than long stretches. Even if they have to study all day or all evening, they should not do more than an hour at a time without having a short rest.

Long breaks

It's important for them to take time out and do things they enjoy after school, over the weekend and during holiday time. There are still some restrictions in place, but watching a film at home, catching up with friends, going out for a walk, playing online games, listening to music, watching

TV are all easy options. Try to have some fun times as a family too – playing games together might inject some much needed levity and laughter at home. Doing something enjoyable gives the brain a chance to switch off, refocus and assimilate information, it's an important way to find an appropriate work-play balance to ensure a productive and happy life in the long term. Try and help them ensure their breaks include a variety of different activities so that they are not always doing the same thing during breaks.

Taking a day off

From time to time, we all need to take a break. When things get tough, it can sometimes be helpful to step away from the problem and revisit it with a calm mind and renewed outlook rather than struggle on. If your child seems to need some time to recharge, give them a little space. You will know whether they need a rest or are making an excuse to do nothing.

Ideas for breaks

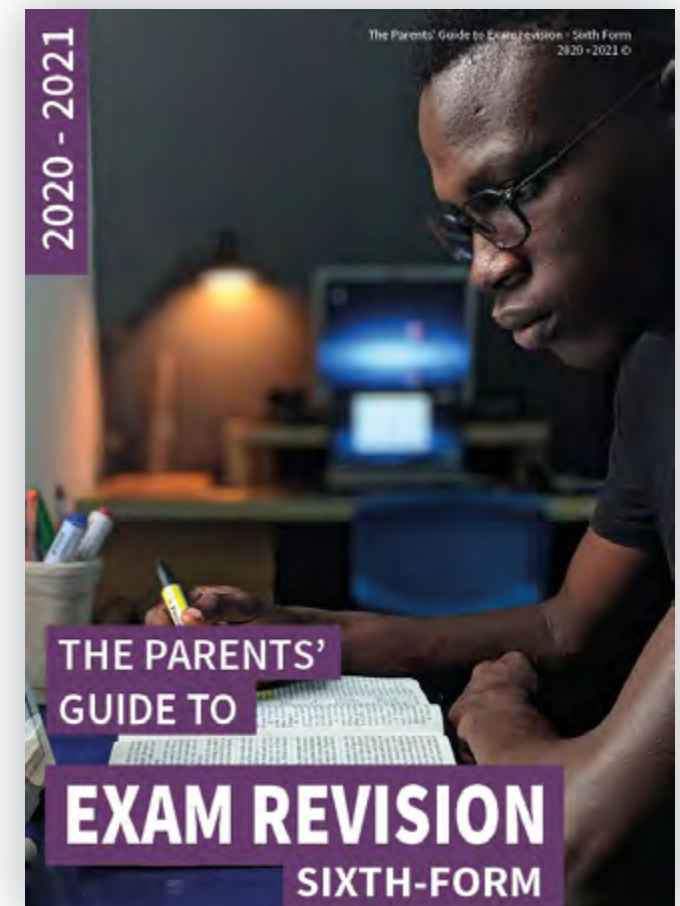
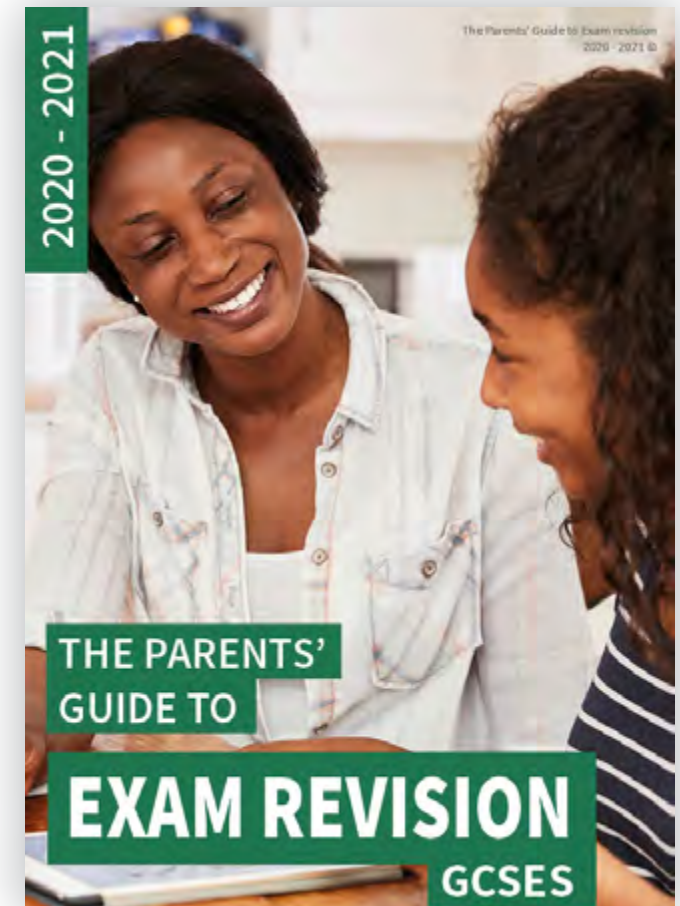
Encourage your child to:

- Get creative, such as painting, puzzling, sewing or drawing
- Get active, such as completing an online workout class, going for a run or playing sports
- Get some fresh air by taking a walk, sitting in the garden or visiting the local park
- Go screen-free and read a book or magazine
- Interact with friends and family
- Relax by taking a bath, watching an episode of their favourite TV series or listening to some music
- Refuel by preparing a healthy snack and eating it away from their desk or computer
- Plan 'me time'

You may also be interested in

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some pages*

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Protect your child's mental health

Staying resilient and managing stress is very important to health and wellbeing and there are proven techniques you can teach your child to use to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. It's perfectly natural for your child to be worried, especially with all the lifestyle changes and uncertainty that coronavirus has caused – you are probably worried too!

In small doses, anxiety can be a good thing: helping your child to focus, get motivated and even recall facts they were unaware they'd learnt.

Prolonged periods or bouts of intense anxiety have a negative impact, but there are lots of ways you can help them manage this anxiety and use routines to help them keep calm. If you haven't introduced them to some of these techniques already, we've included some suggestions over the next few pages. It will put them on positive footing for lifelong healthy habits.

In some cases there can be times when anxiety reaches exceptional levels and professional support is required. We've provided some guidance on how you can tell the difference and where you can reach out.

EXPERIENCING SOME ANXIETY
IS NORMAL BUT NOT IF YOUR
CHILD IS ANXIOUS ALL THE TIME



Signs of anxiety and stress

It's good to be aware of the signs of anxiety and stress so you can watch out for them. A change in behaviour for a day or two might be nothing to worry about, but if you notice a regular change, then it's usually a sign that something is wrong. Some of the more common signs of anxiety include:

- Losing interest in things they've previously enjoyed;
- Behaving in the opposite way to usual – quiet children can become very chatty, chatty children can get withdrawn;
- Being grumpy and irritable;
- Lots of headaches and digestive problems (stomach aches, diarrhoea, constipation, vomiting etc);
- Worrying all the time, this can show itself in only picturing negative outcomes (what if I fail, I'm going to fail, I can't do this);

- Talking over and over the same concern and being unable to either stop thinking about it or to find relief;
- Physical symptoms (sweaty palms, shaking, fast heartbeat, aching muscles);
- Restlessness and being unable to stay still;
- Inability to concentrate (such as taking in what's happening in a TV programme);
- Panic attacks;
- Not sleeping.

Remember to keep perspective. If they have had several late nights, they are likely to be tired and this increases irritability. If they've been exercising, they might have aching muscles. If they've just run to meet you, they'll have a fast heart rate. Individual or a short-term combination of the above symptoms are normal.

NHS
Support with
stress

NHS
Support with
anxiety



Where to get support

Professional support

Professional support includes more than counsellors and psychiatrists (although both these approaches can be helpful). There's a range of professional options available including:

- Teachers at school – both in an academic capacity to help understand subjects better, as tutors to help create better ways of working outside school and pastoral experts who can help with emotional issues. Remember, schools may be closed but teachers are still available and can be contacted (in term time);
- Some schools have an independent counsellor available with whom your children can talk in confidence (i.e. they will not relay the information to the school);
- Peer support networks – these can be very helpful as speaking to someone of a similar age can sometimes feel

easier than speaking to an adult, or speaking to someone just slightly older, who has more recently been through a similar experience can be very reassuring;

- Charities – most now offer both online and telephone support. This anonymity (i.e. not being face-to-face) can make talking over problems and worries easier.

Too much anxiety

If your child is showing several signs of anxiety on a regular basis (several days each week) over a prolonged period of time (several weeks) then do seek help from external support services mentioned above. We are currently experiencing exceptional circumstances likely to increase anxiety levels in all of us, so try to introduce daily exercises proven to reduce stress.





Don't forget to look after yourself

Finally ... don't forget about yourself. This has been a challenging year for your child and it's been challenging for you too. Our lifestyles changed dramatically in a very short space of time, and the "new normal" just doesn't feel normal yet, so it's natural if you are feeling stressed and anxious too. Be sure to include some much needed time for you to try and ensure your needs are being looked after to give you the strength to support those closest to you.

You might want to:

- take a few minutes each day to yourself;
- listen to a podcast;
- get creative and produce your own artwork;
- redecorate or carry out some DIY;
- learn some new recipes;
- reorganise your clothes or spare room;
- watch a television series or sports now it's back on TV;
- try some new relaxation techniques, such as meditation or yoga;
- reconnect with old friends via telephone or video streaming;
- watch an online gig, opera or theatre performance;
- plan a weekend escape; or
- take a walk.

Final words

We believe that as a parent, your influence on your child's wellbeing and, therefore, future success should be recognised and valued. The home environment has a major impact on a child's physical and mental health.

You cannot eliminate all the stress surrounding your children, but you can certainly contribute to reducing the stress and helping them find the most constructive ways to cope, study and revise well, alongside reinforcing healthy lifestyle habits that will serve them well, even once they fly the nest.

Where there are two parental figures at home, whether step-parents or biological parents, it's important to work as a team and keep messaging consistent. Likewise, for those parents with joint custody, agreeing boundaries and working together to provide similar home experiences is the most helpful way forward, though this can be difficult, especially when split-ups have been especially painful and personal wounds are yet to heal. A child

that has two completely different home rules depending on which parent they are staying with receives mixed messages and will likely choose to follow the rules they prefer (which isn't necessarily the ones that put them on the best path for happiness and success). This is especially important this year when the world around them has changed so dramatically within a very short timeframe. They need reassurance and a sense of certainty.

2020 has been a strange year, and there are likely still more surprises in store. One of the great benefits of this year has been more time for families to spend with one another and the opportunity to enjoy and be re-introduced to simple pleasures, such as cooking, gardening and spending time locally. As life begins to revert to the way it was before coronavirus hit, don't lose touch with some of the enjoyable experiences that you have discovered as a family over the past few months and that have brought you closer together. Feeling connected is an intrinsic element of mental wellbeing.

Join us

If you're interested in regular updates about other ways you can help your teenage children, **visit www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/join-us** and join our online community or follow us on social media.



The Parents' Guide to **HOMELIFE & STUDY**

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