

**Coping  
with exam  
season: a  
guide for  
parents  
and  
students**

# The Basics



## Pursue Meaning

Over the coming weeks together we need to share with our children the need to pursue meaning in their school life rather than pursuing instant gratification.

Being successful in the coming months is not about money and success as these are **external motivations** and not sources of happiness in the long term.

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**Internal motivations** give a powerful way to experience meaning.

Meaning doesn't **happen** to you – **you create it**. Success isn't about passing exams in the next few months it is about moving forward and being active in working to clear goals. Currently our children may be reacting to the challenge in a passive way rather than an active way. How much time are they still wasting? How often are they still glued to their phones instead of moving forwards by revising?

## Ditch the phone

Smartphones are unlocked an average of 110 times a day. That is 9 times an hour at peak times. A 2015 study discovered that the pressure people feel to respond to a notification is associated with worse sleep quality, mental and physical burnout.

# The Basics

Our advice to our children needs to be:

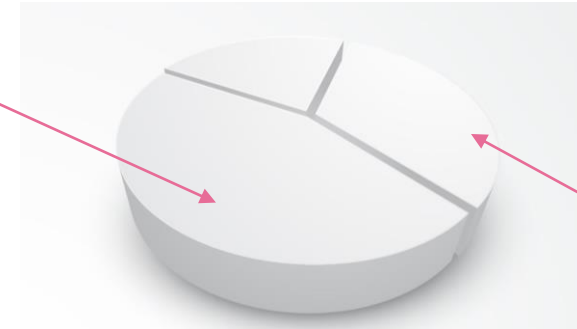
- Switch off automatic notifications
- Set specific times for checking socials

It can make a massive difference to productivity and how you feel. 14-18 year olds look at their phones on average 82 times a day. That's 5+ hours a day on average or the same as having a fairly busy part-time job!

## Eat Right

- Breakfast gives energy and enables thought
- Hydrate throughout the day
- The greener the vegetable the better it is for you
- Bright foods are best
- Too many carbs slow you down

Do stuff



Do more stuff

## Sleep

It seems logical but teenagers during exam season sometimes are not logical but if you have to do more things in less time – invest in your sleep.

- Elite professionals sleep 8 hours and 36 minutes a night
- Up at 6:30? Get to sleep by 10.00pm

# Growth Mindset and Self-esteem

We need to encourage our children to get rid of that fixed mindset.

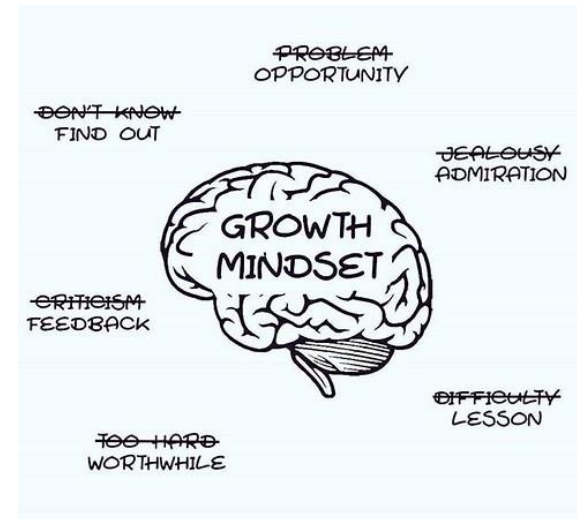
Those with a fixed mindset believe that our abilities are set in stone. You are either clever or the opposite.

This is high stakes thinking – one mistake and you could start thinking that you can't do anything!

People with a growth mindset believe that possibility happens when you are open to learning.

The highest grades don't matter right now after a mock exam – they will come through practice and the occasional failure.

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People with a a fixed mindset see everything in black and white or good and bad. Those people with a growth mindset seek development and know it takes time.

# Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and catastrophising

**Thoughts create feelings**

There may be times in the next few months when our children may have automatic negative thoughts - these are thoughts that are difficult to name and understand what we are feeling. prolonged anxious thoughts. Often there is an **activating event**.

Even as adults, our thoughts are sometimes rigid in thinking and we over-estimate the threat

*These thoughts may come out as, 'I'm crap at this', 'I can't see how I'm going to succeed', 'I can't do this as well as other people' or 'I want to give up'.*

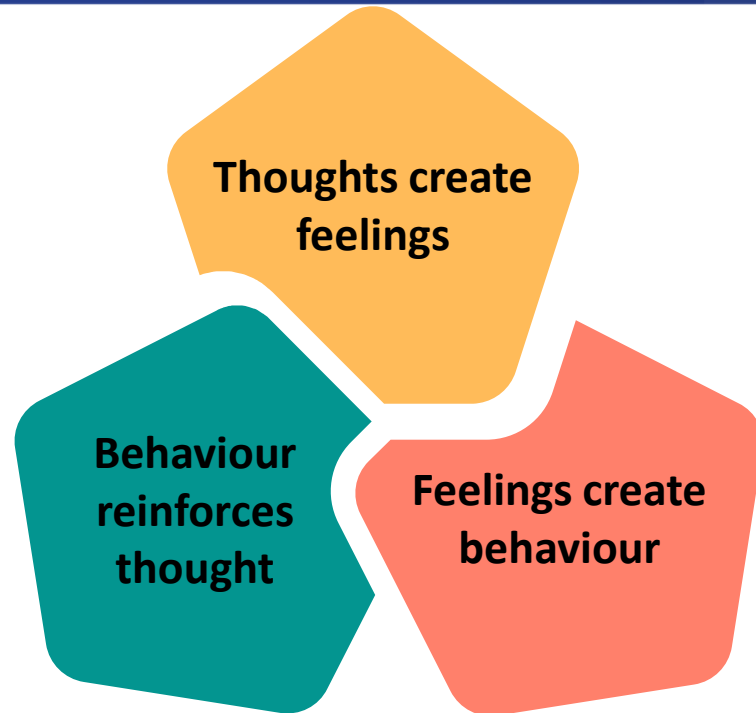
**Catastrophising** - thinking that the worst possible thing will happen – is more likely during exam season. Its important that we are able to recognise it and do something about it.

**Catastrophising** does not factor in the child's ability to cope.

**Thoughts create feelings**

**Feelings create behaviour**

# Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and catastrophising



We attach feelings to these thoughts - we **think** what we **feel**  
Our children during exams may feel angry, nervous or hurt by the experience.

When we are presented with these feelings we need to counter them with a question:

**What evidence do we have that this is true?**

- You can be concerned and we both know that is different from feeling anxious.
- You are aware that exams are important
- You don't need to feel helpless
- I'm going help you to cope on a day to day basis.

# Studying and Learning

## Test anxiety

- Related to performance and outcomes
- Affects girls slightly more than boys
- Linked to fixed mindset, automatic negative thoughts and catastrophising

In reality, a little nervousness before a test is normal . It can help sharpen your mind and focus your attention. It can be fought and defeated.

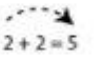





There are a number of strategies to combat test anxiety:

- Learn how to study efficiently
- Study early
- Establish a consistent pretest routine
- Learn relaxation techniques
- Don't forget to eat and drink
- Get some exercise
- Get plenty of sleep
- Use CBT strategies to combat catastrophising and other negative automatic thoughts

# Combat biased thinking

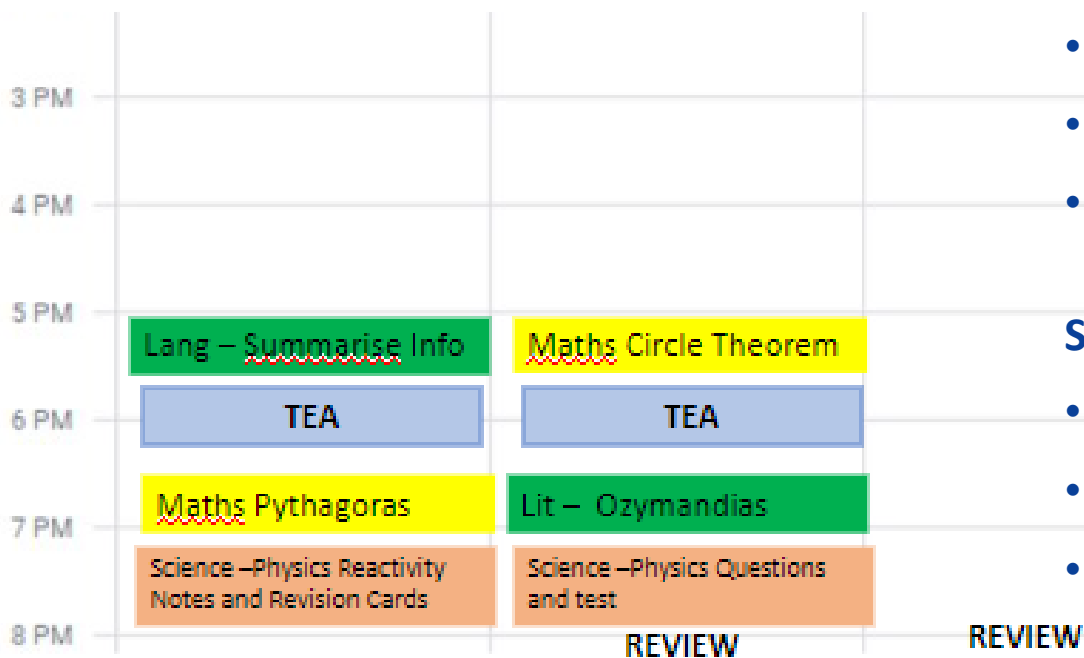
	<b>All-or-nothing thinking</b>	Thinking in extremes. For example, something is either 100% good or 100% bad
	<b>Catastrophizing</b>	Jumping to the worst possible conclusion
	<b>Over-generalizing</b>	Seeing a pattern based upon a single event
	<b>Mental filter</b>	Only paying attention to certain types of evidence ("That doesn't count")
	<b>Disqualifying the positive</b>	Discounting positive information or twisting a positive into a negative

	<b>Jumping to conclusions</b>	Mind reading or predicting the future
	<b>Low frustration tolerance</b>	Saying things like "this is too difficult", "this is unbearable" or "I can't stand it"
	<b>Minimization</b>	Discounting the importance of something
	<b>Emotional reasoning</b>	Assuming that because we feel a certain way our hunch must be true
<b>SHOULD MUST</b>	<b>Demands</b>	Using words like 'should', 'must', and 'ought'

Throughout exam season, your child may experience automatic thoughts and examples of this biased thinking. Providing evidence from experience to counter this is really important. Ask the question, 'Where's the proof? When you tried hard in the past, what happened?'



# Effective Studying – Make a Revision Plan



## Step 1 – When are you revising?

- Are you starting revision during term time?
- How will revision change at half-term?
- Set a clear deadline so you have something to work towards and be realistic

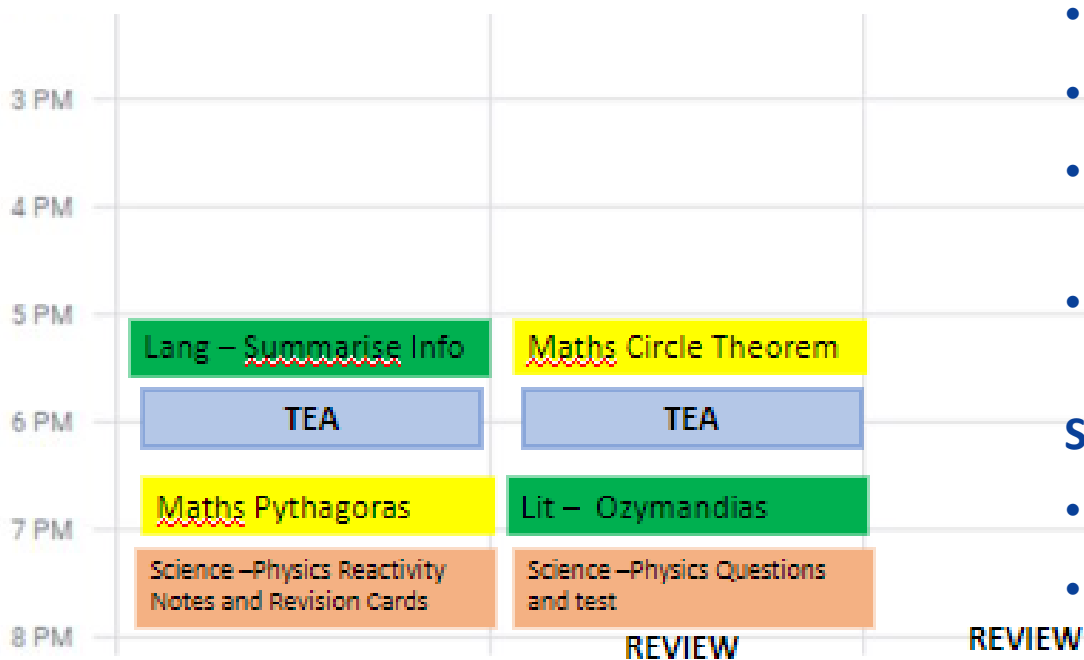
## Step 2 – What are you revising?

- What subject(s) do you need to prioritise? Make a list.
- What are the subjects you are weakest/ strongest at?
- When you get an exam timetable – what exams are first and last is also a consideration.

## Step 3 Break into topics

- 'Revise Maths' is too big and scary and vague to write on a revision timetable
- Break the subject down into the components for the exam.

# Effective Studying – Make a Revision Plan



## Step 4 – Allocate 20-30 minute slots

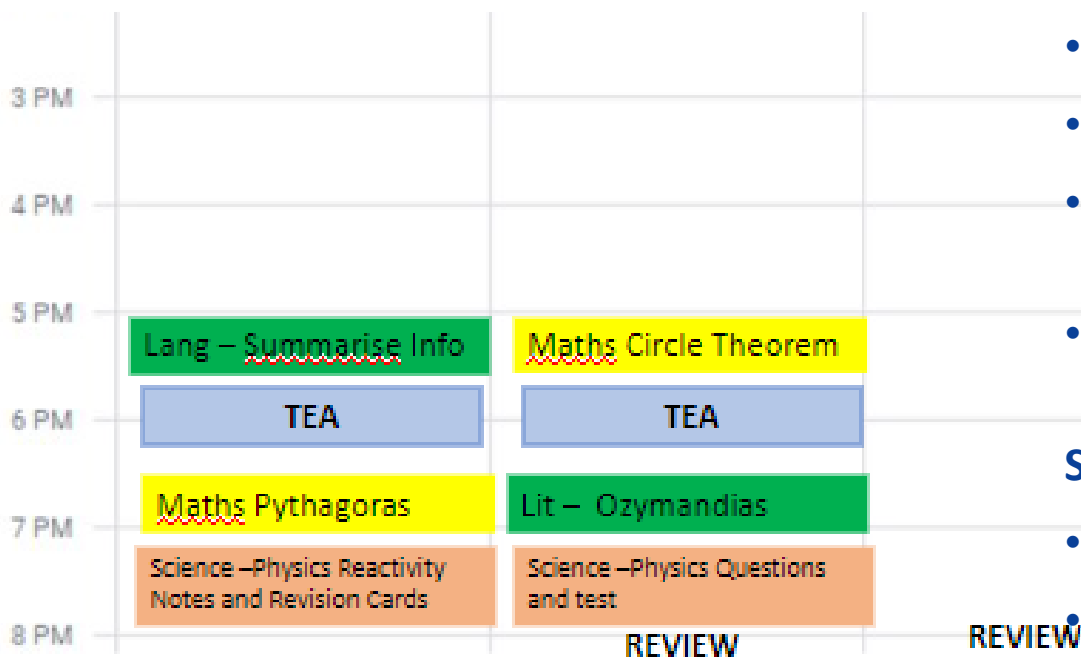
- What is more challenging? Put it where it will be freshest
- Use colours to differentiate between subjects
- What will you get through quickest? Timetable these too as you will get a kick out of feeling that progress too
- Leave a blank 30 mins at the end of the day for testing/ reviewing what you have retained

## Step 5 – Stick to it!

- Self awareness
- Discipline
- Adaptability
- Organisation

The skills you need to develop to stick to a revision timetable are the skills you need to be successful in GCSEs

# Effective Studying – Make a Revision Plan



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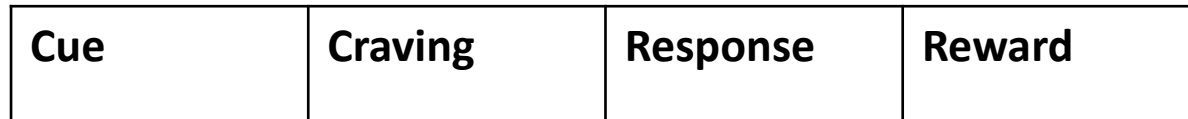
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# Effective Studying – Form habits



Time



## A habit consists of four things:

- A trigger that gets you to act
- A craving – a desire you want to achieve
- A response – the action of the habit itself
- A reward – a positive feeling you get from completing the habit

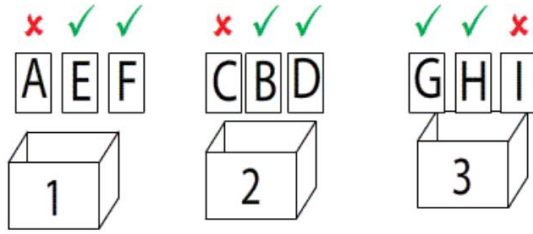
Change your environment to make the revision habit easier to do and harder to avoid.. Place cues or reminders in areas you won't miss.

Parents get copies of the revision timetable and stick them everywhere -on the bedroom door and the living room door. Students: post-its on your mirror are a great hack for getting the day's tasks out of the way.

Create an **implementation intention**: instead of saying 'I'll revise later' say 'I'll start revising at 6pm'.

Parents, try temptation bundling with rewards like snacking whilst revision or rewarding your child with phone time for ten minutes after 30 minutes revision. If you can tie revision with rewards the dopamine hit is something that makes you keep coming back to form the habit.

# Effective Studying – Revision Cards

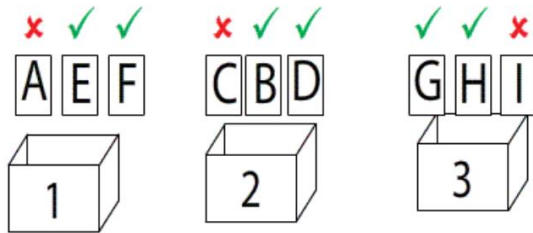


## Revision Cards – why they work

- Employs the concept of **spaced repetition** to enhance brain power and learning.
- Strong neural pathways
- Creating them forces you to present the information in your own words.

1. Make your own
  - Creating them forces you to present the information in your own words.
2. Use words and pictures
  - A **mixture of pictures and words** works better than pictures alone.
3. Write one question per card
  - Don't mistake **recognition** for **recall**.
4. Break Complex Concepts Into Multiple Questions
  - By including multiple facts on one card, you're more likely to run into **illusions of competence**
  - Your brain mistakes **recognition** for **recall**
  - By ensuring that each of your cards only contains one question or fact, you won't run into this mistake.
5. Say Your Answers Out Loud When Studying
  - And quiz both ways (start with the front/ flip to start from the back)

# Effective Studying – Revision Cards



## The Leitner System

Sebastian Leitner, a German science journalist, created the flashcard study method called the **Leitner System** to assist in more effective learning.

The technique focuses on the concept of **spaced repetition** to enhance brain power and learning.

- Label three to five boxes with study sessions. For example, one box is to be reviewed **every day**, the second box is to be reviewed on **Tuesday** and **Thursday**. The third box is to be reviewed on **Saturday**.
- Make sure you add your study time to the calendar as it will help the execution of the technique in an organised manner.

# Procrastination- or the art of putting something off

Procrastination is the battle between your present self and your future self. Everybody procrastinates. We know we should probably make a start – but what's another hour? Another day? Another week?

## **Eat the frog**

Mark Twain said 'if it is part of your job to eat a frog it's best to do that at the start of your day'. Get the 'frogs' out of the way early.

Focus on the first ten minutes. Even if it's revising for a subject you don't like, focus on the first ten minutes of that revision. You will have soon eaten the frog.

## **Break down your to do list**

There are loads of topics to revise for each subject. Multiply this by all the subjects you have and it is daunting. Use your revision calendar to break down each day into four or five things you need to do.

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## **Perfectionism – the other enemy of getting stuff done**

There is no such thing as perfect.  
When imperfect happens the real work begins.

Excellent cannot be achieved through perfection but through failure.

- Don't feel embarrassed to admit that you suffer from procrastination – we all do!
- Sharing your struggles makes procrastination easier to overcome
- Ask family to help you deal with it
- If you tell someone you plan to revise then you're more likely to do it.
- Share your revision plan – let everyone know what your intention is

# Getting through it together

**Its safe to say that the next few months will be hard at times on you and your child , so a few reminders can help.**

- Get involved in the planning process
- Getting your child to do it all by themselves is daunting
- Sharing in the process also removes procrastination as you know what topics are planned for that evening
- Help your child identify short term goals in their revision – these will grow into longer term aims.

## **The power of talk**

Perhaps the most important thing is to set time to talk together.

Positive self –talk and stopping those automatic negative thoughts are useful tools in getting teens through revision.

However, you're not a teacher. If parents try to help through 'teaching' it may lead to further problems.

So, **coach** don't teach

Use three questions to help you be constructive in your support:

- The kickstart question: **'What is on your mind?'**
- Follow this up with the AWE question: **'And what else?'**
- End the conversation about revision and how your child is coping by asking the focus question:
- **'What is the real challenge here for you?'**



# Supporting your child through exams – Advice from YoungMinds.org.uk

- Work with your child to find what revision style works for them.
- Encourage your child to take revision breaks and find a balance between studying and doing things they find enjoyable and relaxing.
- Make sure they are eating and drinking at regular intervals.
- Encourage them to take some time after revising to wind down.
- Reassure them – reinforce that you are and will be proud of them no matter what happens.
- Remain positive and hopeful!



- Plan a treat or an activity together to mark the end of the exams.
- Set aside one to one time so that they can talk to you about any worries.
- Let them know their feelings are valid and normal, but also offer support and solutions where possible.
- Anxiety is often worst at night and this means it is useful to encourage a good bedtime routine.
- Work with them to develop relaxation techniques.
- If anxiety and stress start impacting their day-to-day life, seek help from your GP.