THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO

Teenage Stress & Anxiety

2025 - 2026

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Introduction

In small doses, stress can be a great motivator, helping us get things done. The problems set in when we experience high levels of stress over extended periods of time. That can be damaging, both to mental and physical health. It's a bit like pulling out all the stops and working at full pelt – all day every day. We simply can't keep it up.

Lots of things can cause us stress, and they're different person to person. Some people adore being the centre of attention, so a public speaking gig wouldn't make them stressed at all. For others who don't like being in the limelight, even the thought of presenting to an audience could release a wave of stress hormones, worse still having to do it for real.

Because stress is subjective, it can be overlooked. We might miss that other people could get stressed about things we find easy to cope with. Some people hide stress, worrying it could make them seem weak or incapable. We've outlined some indicators to help you spot the signs if your teen is getting too stressed. You can't stop your teen experiencing stress; however, you can help them develop systems to deal with it more effectively.

The best way to reduce stress is to create a life filled with habits that are known as effective stress busters. This builds mental resilience, meaning it's easier to bounce back from setbacks. We've outlined some of our favourites in this guide.

We're all for nurturing healthy habits long term as the best way to build mental resilience, but there are times when all of us succumb to a moment of stress and what's needed is a quick fix, so we've also included some ideas on things to do in the moment as well as ideas for long-term strategies.

Stress isn't something your or your teen need to deal with alone, so there's plenty of suggestions abut where to go for help and support if it's needed.

Spotting When They're Stressed

It's perfectly natural for your child to be worried about taking exams and how they will perform – you might even be a little worried too! In small doses, anxiety can be a good thing: helping your child to focus, get motivated to study and even recall answers they were unaware they'd learnt.

Prolonged periods or bouts of intense anxiety may have a negative impact, but there are lots of ways you can help them manage this anxiety and use routines to help keep them calm. If you haven't introduced them to some of these techniques already, we've included some suggestions.

However, in some cases there can be times when anxiety reaches exceptional levels and professional support is required. How can you tell the difference?

It's good to be aware of the signs of anxiety so you can watch out for them

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.

Distraction Techniques

If you notice your child is suffering, it's time to help them. That doesn't always mean you stepping in (that could add to the anxiety) although it's good to let them know you've noticed something's wrong and give them a chance to talk to you if they want to.

Avoid broaching the subject in front of others, this could make them feel embarrassed or inadequate and make them feel worse (they might think they are doing a job good of hiding it). Don't forget, the aim isn't to eliminate anxiety but to teach them how to manage it.

There are two ways to help: distracting them from the immediate problem or teaching them techniques to cope better with stress.

Let's start with distraction. Encourage them to take part in an activity that will stop them thinking about whatever is making them anxious. Giving the brain some time out from worrying can help obtain a better perspective later.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

It doesn't matter what activity - dancing, football, swimming, walking – so long as it's something they enjoy, gets their endorphins flowing and requires focus so the mind is concentrating on something different.

Team games are great, as connectivity and communications with others is restorative.

MUSIC

Music has a powerful effect on mood and memory – it can instantly lift spirits or provide a moment of calm. Encourage your teen to listen to songs that bring back positive feelings or help them relax. For managing anxiety, calming or instrumental music often works better than fast-paced or highly energising tracks, especially during revision or just before bed.

TALKING

It may not be to you! A sibling, grandparent, family friend or friend at school or perhaps a charity chatline. Expressing worries out loud can sometimes make them feel less significant than when they're playing on loop in the mind. Talking aloud also encourages finding their own solutions – prompts such as 'what would need to happen to make you feel better', can help them reframe to seeking solutions rather than dwelling on troubles.

LAUGHING

Laughter is a natural stress-reliever. It releases feel-good hormones, helps ease tension and can shift your teen's mood in just a few minutes. Encourage them to take short breaks to watch an episode of a favourite comedy, some light-hearted YouTube clips, or anything that makes them genuinely laugh out loud. These small moments of joy can make a big difference to their overall wellbeing during revision and exam time.

AVOIDING STIMULANTS

Bright lights, loud music, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, and general over-stimulation — such as fast-paced computer games or action-packed films — can all increase adrenaline levels. This puts the body in a more alert state and makes it harder to wind down before bed.

To help the body and mind settle into a calmer rhythm, avoid the following in the hour or two before sleep:

- Bright or harsh lighting
- Loud or fast-paced music
- Caffeine, sugar, and energy drinks
- Action-packed films or video games
- Alcohol (for older teens)

Creating a peaceful environment makes a real difference. Switching off ceiling lights and using dimmable lamps or small bedside lights can help signal to the brain that it's time to rest.

Proven Ways to Reduce Stress

The second way to help is to provide an opportunity for them to learn some proven techniques which help reduce anxiety.

It's a really good idea for your child to practise some of these methods when they're not anxious, so they can familiarise themselves with the approaches and get comfortable with the experience and how it makes them feel. Then, should anxiety strike, it's something they're relaxed about doing. Regularly practising relaxation techniques helps keep anxiety at bay too. Some good choices are:

MEDITATION

Meditation transports the mind to a completely different place and experience. There are many different types of meditation including auditory (describing experiences) and visual (looking at something).

Breathing, yoga and meditation can be done in short or long bursts and alone or in groups, which makes them ideal to put into practise when on the go or needing a ready tool when nerves strike.

PRACTISING YOGA

Practising yoga regularly has been shown to improve heart rate, flexibility and physical strength. It also supports mental wellbeing – the focus required to hold each position helps quiet the mind and redirect anxious thoughts. Even short sessions can be a great way for your teen to reset and feel more balanced.

Discover more

- Headspace
- Yoga for stress
- Engaging the senses

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Breathing is a simple but powerful tool for managing stress. Slow, deep breaths can quickly calm the body and reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety. Teaching your teen how to breathe deeply – especially during moments of pressure – can stop stress from spiralling. Techniques like meditation, visualisation and yoga all promote healthy breathing habits and can be great tools to explore together.

APPS

Apps like Headspace can be downloaded onto your teen's phone, giving them easy access to guided breathing, meditation or calming exercises whenever they need it. Having this kind of support in their pocket means they can manage stress independently – whether they're at home, in school or on the go.

HERBS AND SMELLS

For centuries we've used herbs and smells to invoke different atmospheres. Essential oils can be burnt in diffusers, added to baths, placed on candles, mixed with water as a spritz or poured on a tissue (great for on the go and to pop in a pocket) and are inexpensive to buy.

Some useful staples are:

- **Lemon** (promotes concentration and calming)
- **Lavender** (reduces stress and can help sleep)
- **Jasmine** (uplifting and calming)
- **Peppermint** (invigorating so helps to clear the mind)
- **Rosemary** (acts as a pick-me-up)

Herbal teas are a great caffeine free hot drink and, as well as benefiting from the smell, the herbs work within the system too. Try camomile, peppermint, lavender or lemon balm.

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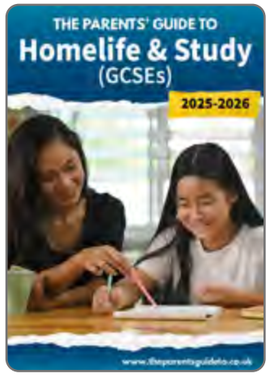
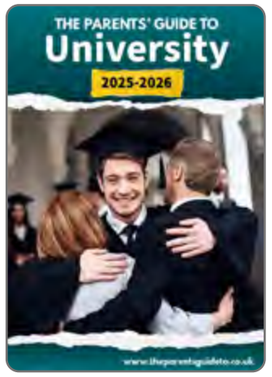


Each guide is designed with YOU in mind, offering clear, practical steps you can take at home.

Next steps:



Building Mental Resilience (MIND)

The best way to reduce stress is to create a life filled with habits that are known as effective stress busters. This builds mental resilience, meaning it's easier to bounce back from set-backs. Here's our twenty favourite ideas to share with your teen, ten focusing on the mind and ten on the body.

Think of Something Else

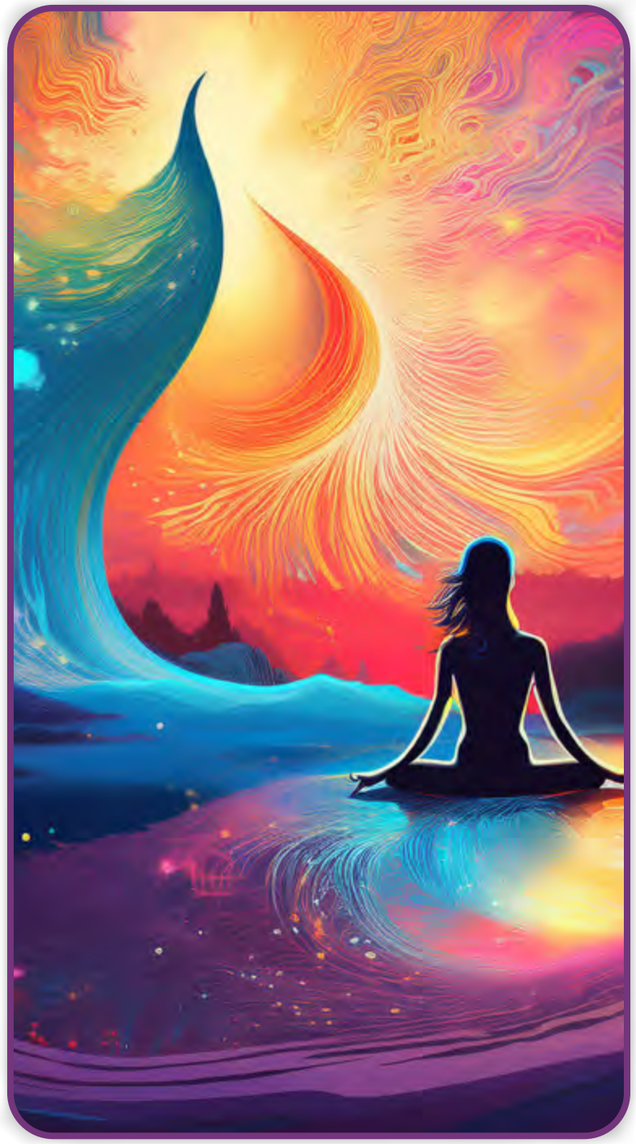
Not as simple as it sounds but unbelievably effective and does work with training. Every time your mind wanders to what's bothering you, or if you keep replaying the same scenario over and over, make yourself think of something else. This is even more powerful if you think about something you like or an experience you enjoy.

Live In the Moment

We can't change the past and we don't know what's going to happen in the future, so it's a surprise that lots of us spend most of our lives thinking about what's already happened or worrying about what might happen. Give yourself a break! Focus exclusive-ly on what's happening right now.

Watch a Film

Take a break and escape your mind for a couple of hours by watching a film. It's a good one if your energy levels are low.



Visualisation

Strange though it may seem, the mind doesn't often distinguish between what's actually happening and what we're thinking about. So picturing dreams, aspirations, nice things all help to create feelings of positivity. Your mind can take you anywhere, so why not let it take you somewhere nice?

Write Down Your Worries

Putting pen to paper (or fingers to the keypad) can help the mind switch off by providing reassurance that the worry won't be forgotten because it's down in black and white. Articulating the issue can also be helpful in gaining perspective on whether this is something that requires a lot of attention or can be put aside.

Create Positive Thought Patterns

Our mind makes connections and these become automatic thought patterns over time. If we make associations that are negative, our mind jumps to the negative thoughts automatically whenever it recognizes the trigger. The trick is to create positive associations. This takes time to learn but is very effective. For example, instead of getting angry, frustrated and miserable if we can't do something we want to do, we create a link that takes us to thinking of the other great things to do if we can't act on our initial idea.

Building Mental Resilience (BODY)

Eat Well

Stick to a regular, balanced diet. Avoid bingeing on sugary or salty foods, carbonated drinks or ready meals. Try nuts, fresh fruit, veg and something home-cooked instead. What you put inside you affects how you feel. By all means enjoy a treat – just now and then

Hang Out With Friends

Our social networks are critical to wellbeing, especially for teens. Even if it's online, keep up with friends through calls, facetime and messaging – but all the better if you can meet up in person.

Avoid Stimulants

In the short term, you might feel great (or better), but these props become less effective with regular use and can be harmful in the long term if you come to rely on them. Learn healthy ways to modify your mood.

Stay Hydrated

We humans are two-thirds water, so drink plenty to keep fluids at the right level, allowing your millions of cells to do their thing at optimum capacity. Watery foods contribute, but most people underestimate their fluid intake, so drinking about 1.5-2 litres of water every day will ensure you get enough.

Get Out In Nature

There is no substitute for the great outdoors. Nature is calming and soothing. Seeing and feeling the cycles of nature is reassuring and being physical is very good for you.

Have A Cup of Tea

OK, so maybe this is a bit too British for some of you, but it's the comfort in the routine that makes this so effective. Boiling the kettle, selecting a tea, waiting for it to brew and maybe even enjoying a biscuit alongside creates a routine focusing on something nice and reliable that you can repeat day after day.

Sleep

Sleep is the number one contributor to good health. Without it, we can be tired, irritable, unable to concentrate, lethargic, argumentative, unable to eat – all traits that lead to feeling stressed and potentially creating stressful situations for ourselves through poor decision making and inappropriate reactions. Keep a regular bedtime and wake up routine, dim the lights a couple of hours before bed and switch off devices half-an-hour before trying to sleep to improve your chances of a good night's rest.

Pamper Yourself

Are you able to name something you can do just for yourself that really matters to you? If not, the starting point is to find one! Make sure you do something just for you on a regular basis. It might be an early night, reading in bed, going for a drive, taking 10 minutes quiet time, watching YouTube. Whatever it is, it should make you feel good and should be something you can do for yourself (not something you need someone else to do for you).

Quick-fix solutions

We're all for nurturing healthy habits long term as the best way to build mental resilience, but there are times when all of us succumb to a moment of stress and what's needed is a quick fix. With that in mind, here's 10 instant ways to reduce stress. They're easy to put into action and most of them can be done anywhere at any time.

1. Get laughing!

Laughter literally changes the chemical composition in the body. Put on a favourite comedy show, sit back and watch. Great if both concentration and energy levels are low, as it requires minimum effort. Half an hour is ideal, but there are lots of short clips on You Tube and a burst of laughter will reduce stress instantly. Unbelievably, faking a smile will have a similar effect, so if your teen's somewhere they can't get a comedy boost, pretending to smile will quickly result in them feeling more relaxed.

2. Take a brisk walk outdoors

Being physical is fantastic for both physical and mental health. This needn't be a great long trek – just ten minutes of brisk walking can get the circulation flowing, activate muscles, clear the head and stimulate the mind with more positive thoughts.

3. Breathe

Stress often causes short, shallow breathing, which can make anxious feelings worse. Help your teen learn simple breathing techniques to restore calm and regain control when things feel overwhelming. One method is to breathe in through the nose for five seconds, then out through the mouth for five seconds. Repeating this steady rhythm for two to three minutes can slow their heart rate, reduce stress, and help them feel more grounded.

Discover more

- Breathing Exercises

4. Look at something inspiring

Whether it's a photo, picture, painting, fabric, building or statue, looking at inspiring things will give you a lift. Encourage your teen to keep photos of anything that sparks joy in them on their phones so it's easy to look at; each time they do, they'll get a boost of feel-good hormones.

5. Read (or listen to) a book

One of the great things about reading a book is that it's a creative process. Unlike a film where you're presented with images and just need to watch, as you read a book the writer is inviting you to picture the situation in a way that resonates with you. It's a terrific way to step into another world and place – even if only for a few minutes at a time.

6. Do something for someone else

Good deeds create virtuous circles. They're not only helpful to the recipient, the giver gets a feel good boost from helping someone else. Win-win all round. It's one of the reasons volunteering is a great idea. Doing the occasional thing for our friends, family and neighbours can create the same effect.

7. Take a bath

Another easy one when energy levels are low. For best effect, add some essential oils, bubble bath or anything that creates a smell that makes them feel nurtured (good examples are lavender, vanilla, chamomile or cinnamon). Lay back, relax in the warm water and stress will wash away. Great to try ahead of bedtime, to help promote a restful night's sleep.

8. Stretch

Stress tends to make us tense up, contracting muscles, folding inwards on ourselves, compressing the lungs and body. Make a conscious effort to combat stress by stretching one body area at a time (such as arms, legs, neck, feet, hands), pulling shoulders back to expand the lungs, and loosening the tension that's built up.

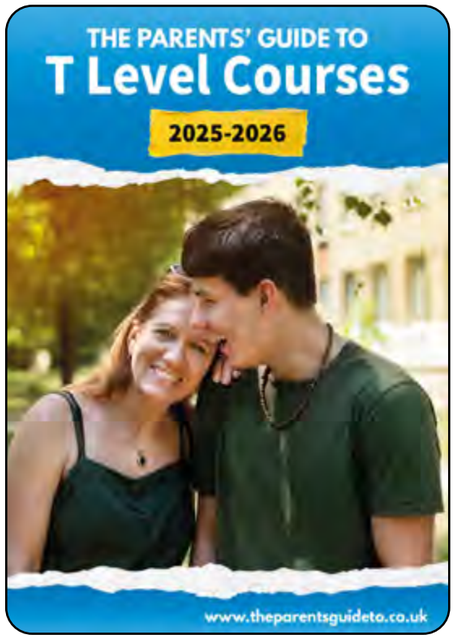
9. Play some music

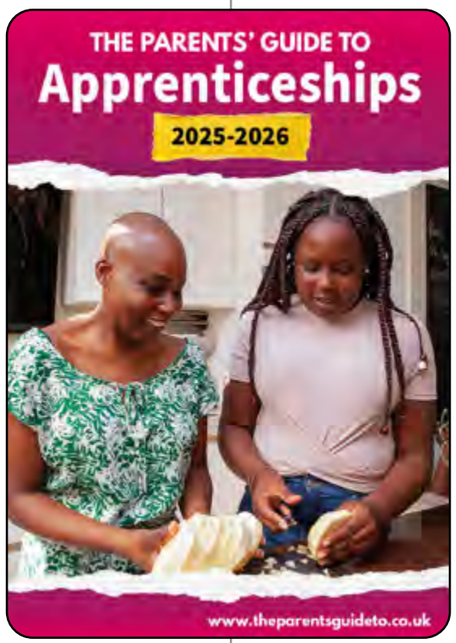
There is no quicker and easier way to completely change your mood than listening to a piece of music. Make sure your teen's playing a feel-good vibe if they need uplifting, or a calming tempo if they're trying to relax.

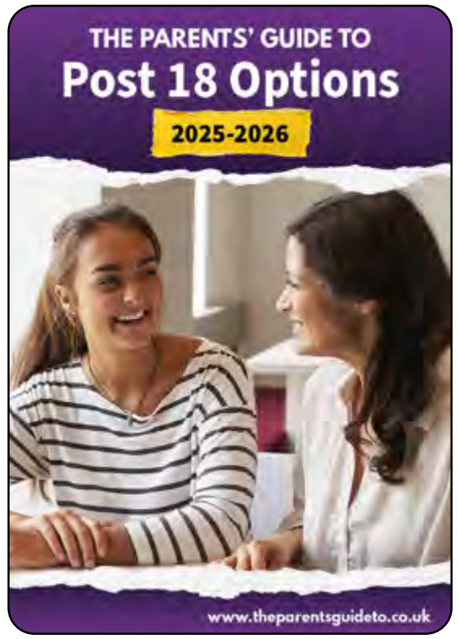
10. Snuggle up with your pet

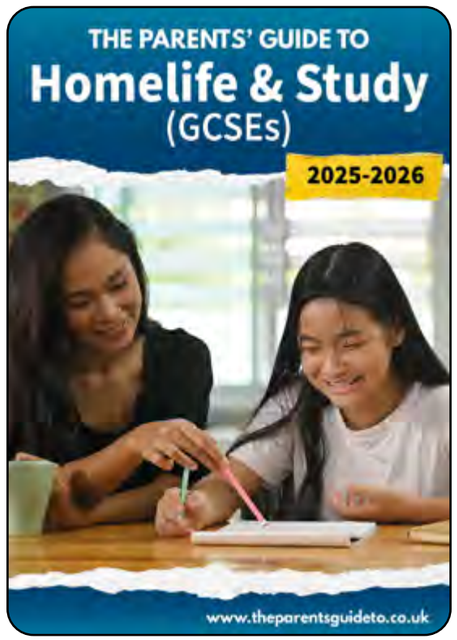
Having a cuddle with our furry friends can be very soothing and help relieve anxiety.

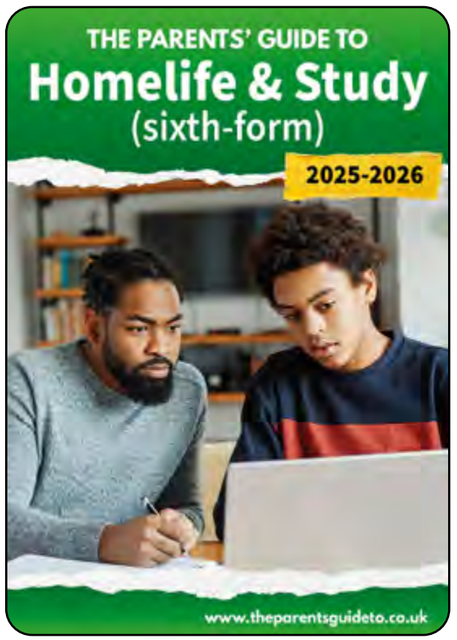
The Parents' Guide to:

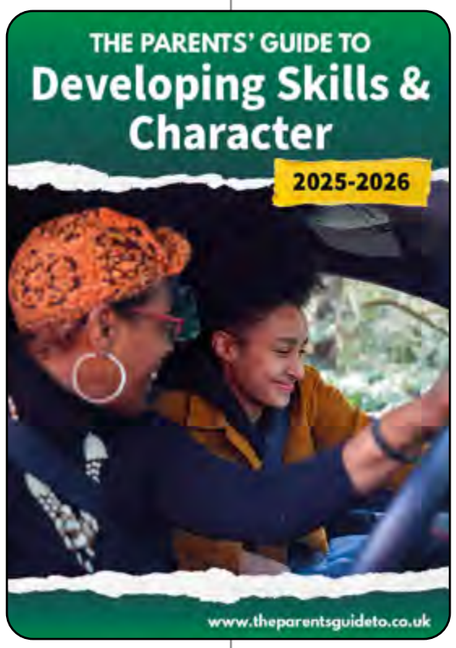












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Looking After The Basics

How deeply we feel and react to things isn't just shaped by external events – it's also influenced by what's going on inside us. Underlying factors like sleep, diet and hydration can all have a significant impact on how your teen copes with everyday challenges. That's why it's important to help them take care of the basics.

Over the next few pages, you'll find practical tips to support your teen in avoiding habits that may be unhelpful – and in building ones that promote better physical and emotional wellbeing. Even small changes to daily routines can make a big difference to how they feel and function.

For example, when we're tired, everything tends to feel worse.

Getting enough sleep is the cornerstone of good mental and physical health – without it, moods dip, concentration drops and small setbacks can feel overwhelming.

What they eat and drink also plays a role. A varied, balanced diet helps provide the nutrients needed for stable energy and mood, while too many sugary or processed foods can lead to highs and crashes. Hydration matters too – teens often reach for fizzy or energy drinks, but water remains the best option for sustained focus and wellbeing.

You don't need to overhaul everything at once – and it's not about perfection. What matters most is encouraging small, positive habits that help your teen feel more in control and better able to manage whatever comes their way.

Sleep

Teens need a lot of sleep – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night - given the huge changes taking place in their bodies.

Many teens don't get enough sleep – either because they're revising into the small hours or more interesting temptations (such as box sets and social media) encourage them to stay awake.

To make sure they're getting enough, work backwards. If they have to get up at 7.00 am, then they need to be asleep by 11.00 pm latest – which means heading to bed about 10.00 pm. What can you do?

A bedtime routine

Creating a "bedtime" routine helps calm the mind and prepares 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 encourage your teen to get into the habit of doing the same things before bed. Going to sleep at a similar time each night also helps. This includes weekends.

It's not easy telling teens what to do, but if you can be firm about bedtime and winding down before sleep when they're in their mid-teens, there's a better chance they'll continue good habits by themselves in the future.

Bedtime routines could include:

- enabling Do Not Disturb on their mobile so it automatically comes on each evening
- taking a bath
- having a warm drink
- dimming the lights
- relaxing with soft music, reading, watching a favourite programme
- putting away school work and getting their things ready for the next day

Reducing anxiety

Jotting down niggling thoughts or important things to do the next day in a notebook takes away the worry that they'll forget something. Doing this before bed can stop their mind turning over worries once the lights go out.

Sharing a room

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

Getting up

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning. Long weekend lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at the right time when it comes to Sunday night. Make plans for weekend mornings so they have a reason to get up.

Walk your talk!

Are you setting a good example? The older your child gets, the harder it is for you to insist on what they do, but you can encourage them by being a great role model. It might be harder for them to get into good sleep routines if they see you are not following the advice you give them.

Mobiles and screens – the enemy of sleep!

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by your teen's ready access to a 24/7 online community on their phones, not to mention the temptation to play games and catch up with box sets late into the night.

Trying to separate teens from their phones is a battle we don't recommend. Instead, encourage them to get into healthy phone habits and use the features on their phones to improve sleep quality. Establishing good phone habits now will benefit them hugely later in life too.

Work together

Creating rules for the whole family can be an effective way of encouraging boundaries around phone use. When you're all in it together, they don't feel singled out.

Of course, this means you have to stick to the rules too!

- no phones at the table during mealtimes
- no phone use when watching TV/films together as a family
- no phones before school/work
- no phone use after 10:00 pm

Discover more

- NHS - sleep
- Teen Sleep Hub

Imposing Rules:

For younger teens, you might want to check or limit their phone use until they understand why regulating screen time is important for their wellbeing:

- **OurPact** - enables you to block or grant access to internet time, from anywhere
- **Netflix** - modify user preferences to restrict your teen watching at inappropriate times or block programmes and box sets that you don't want them to watch (removal won't be instant but will filter through)
- **mSpy** - monitor your children's phone activity from your own devices
- **Google Family Link** – lets you manage app downloads, set daily screen time limits, and remotely lock your teen's device at bedtime. Ideal for gradually encouraging healthy digital habits.

Helping Your Teen Switch Off: Phone Habits for Sleep

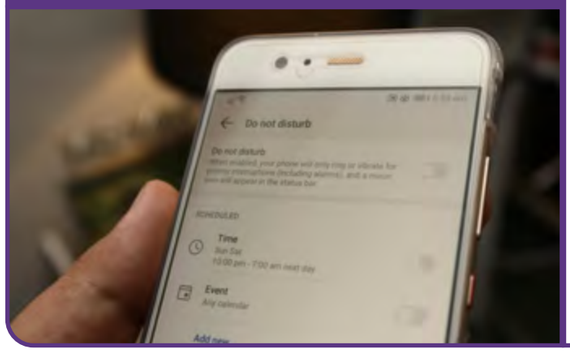
1. Go Screen Free

30 mins screen-free as they go to sleep. They can use their phone to listen to audio books, podcasts or relaxing music during this time – and set timers so if they nod off sooner, the app will close.

2. Use Built-In Sleep Routines

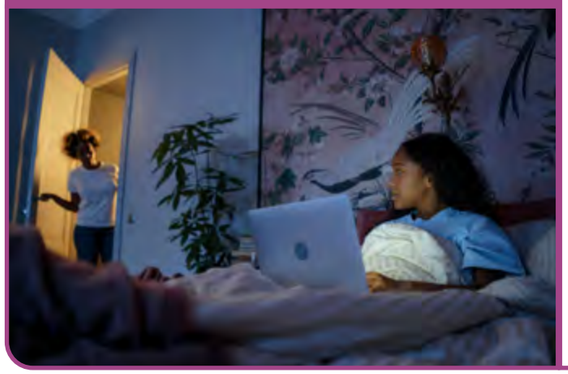
Set phone to Sleep Focus (iPhone) or Bedtime mode (Android). The time the schedule starts and ends can be different for weekdays and weekends. Benefits include reducing/silencing notifications, making the home-screen less stimulating, dimming wallpaper, activating grey scale

3. Use "Do Not Disturb"



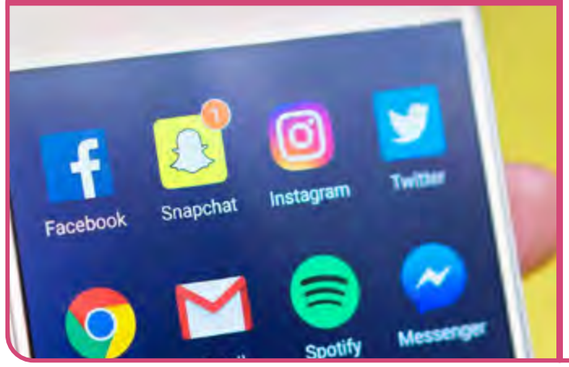
Auto-activate "Do not Disturb" between 10.00 pm and 06.00 am to silence incoming calls and notifications. You can make exceptions for selected numbers -such as yours, so if they're out late one evening and you need to reach them, you can!

4. Switch to Night Mode



Use the phone's night screen settings to reduces glare throughout the evening (white light on bright screens prevents sleepiness).

5. Restrict App Use



Set timers to limit app use – such as 45 mins per day on TikTok. This can increase their awareness of how much time they're spending on the phone. It may not feel like much, but 10 minutes here and there adds up, and when they combine multiple apps, they might be surprised.

6. Delay Scrolling

Use "one sec" or "ScreenZen" to add a delay before launching social media apps. This gives teens a chance to stop and think before automatically scrolling and getting hooked content.

Diet and Nutrition

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 before leaving the house (even if it is only cereal), provide a packed lunch and a nutritious supper in the evening.

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, sweetcorn, 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!

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. Providing a packed lunch and snacks for them when they are on the go can help ensure they are eating the right types of food. If possible, sit down for a family meal together at the end of each day (mobile and tablet free!). Not only will this start 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. If chocolate is a must, swap milk chocolate or chocolate bars 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.

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 take-aways, 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.

Healthy snacks shopping list

- ✓ Apple slices with almond butter
- ✓ Avocado on wholemeal toast
- ✓ Banana and peanut butter
- ✓ Berry smoothie with Greek yoghurt
- ✓ Blueberries with cottage cheese
- ✓ Carrot sticks with hummus
- ✓ Celery sticks with cream cheese
- ✓ Chia pudding with berries
- ✓ Cucumber slices with tzatziki
- ✓ Dark chocolate (70% plus)
- ✓ Edamame beans
- ✓ Greek yoghurt with honey and nuts
- ✓ Hard-boiled eggs
- ✓ Homemade granola bars
- ✓ Kale crisps
- ✓ Mixed nuts and dried fruit
- ✓ Oatcakes / flapjacks
- ✓ Olives and feta cheese
- ✓ Popcorn (air-popped)
- ✓ Raspberries with dark chocolate chips
- ✓ Rice cakes
- ✓ Sliced peppers with guacamole
- ✓ Strawberries dipped in Greek yoghurt

Growing up

As your teen gets older and more independent, they'll start preparing their own food and it's not possible for you to watch what they're 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.

When they're eating away from home (for example at school) try to provide food, rather than money, so they're not tempted to spend on unhealthy favourites.

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. However, tired teenagers are often tempted by convenience and "quick fix" energy boosts so may be drawn towards unhealthy options despite your best efforts to encourage them otherwise.

Walk your talk!

The foods you have available in your house, and what you eat will influence your child's choices. Are you being a good role model?

Keeping hydrated improves concentration and focus

Hydration

A large proportion of the body is made up of water. Not drinking enough 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 lemon, lime, orange, 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.

What's enough?

Some fluid intake comes from food (usually around 20%) and the rest from drinks. The amount needed can vary from day to day. For example, hot weather and exercise could mean sweating more, so it would be important to drink extra to replace the fluid lost.

The Eatwell Guide recommends drinking 6-8 glasses of water each day, which is about 1.5-2 litres. Tea and coffee count towards this.

Walk your talk!

If your child never sees you drinking a glass of water they are less likely to think of drinking themselves.

Caffeine

Caffeine is well-known for increasing energy levels and it's easily available, so many teens look to it for a boost when they're flagging. It's fast-acting, meaning most of us can feel the effects within half-an-hour of having caffeine, and for some in less than five minutes!

Caffeine affects us all in different ways, and whilst initially the impact can be positive (feeling more awake and able to concentrate), caffeine stays in the system for up to twelve hours, and can have negative side-effects such as preventing sleep, and causing restlessness and anxiety. Some people are more sensitive to it than others.

On average, adults shouldn't consume more than 400mg of caffeine a day and adolescents should have much less. Like most things, in large doses caffeine can be harmful.

Discover more

- NHS Live Well
- Nutrition.org.uk

Does coffee-free mean caffeine-free?

We all know there's caffeine in coffee, but it's also in tea, energy drinks and chocolate, so keep an eye on how much of these your child consumes. 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.

If your child regularly drinks one or two cups of coffee each day, it's absolutely fine to continue this, even during exam time, as their body will be used to it. What's not good is introducing changes, so they shouldn't start drinking a cup of coffee or two during revision periods to help keep them alert if this is not something they do regularly. It's more likely to make them jittery, hyper and unable to concentrate.

Lots of products high in caffeine are available in health food shops which can give the impression that they're good for wellbeing, but drinking or eating too much can have negative side-effects.b

Energy shots and drinks

Energy shots are often very high in caffeine and a firm favourite with teens. They can be deceptive as they are tiny in quantity but often packed with caffeine – for example a 60 ml shot can contain around 200mg of caffeine. Likewise, many energy drinks don't necessarily have huge percentages of caffeine, but they are served in large volumes (half litre bottles) so the amount of caffeine your child is drinking is a lot (160mg of caffeine in a can of Monster), whereas a small glass of the same product would be fine.

Most supermarkets and high street stores have banned sales of energy drinks to under 16s.

Food

Less obvious sources of caffeine are foods. Chocolate cake with chocolate frosting or cup cakes with chocolate topping are likely to be very high in caffeine (as well as sugar) so this is not ideal to eat as a dessert after dinner. Likewise coffee flavoured products can also contain lots of caffeine, so look out for ice-creams, frozen yogurts and milkshakes.

Isotonic gels

Teens often love isotonic gels, some of which contain as much as 75 mg of caffeine per pack. These are fine consumed in moderation but watch out that your child isn't having too many or substituting an energy rush when they are thirsty and should be drinking water.

Effects of caffeine

Too much caffeine can result in loss of sleep, loss of energy, low mood and low concentration – the opposite of what's needed to revise well. Caffeine is also long lasting, so drinking caffeine-high drinks in the afternoon can still impact on your child's ability to sleep that night. It's an absolute no to drinking coffee (or other caffeine fuelled drinks) late in the evening to try and overcome tiredness and revise into the night.

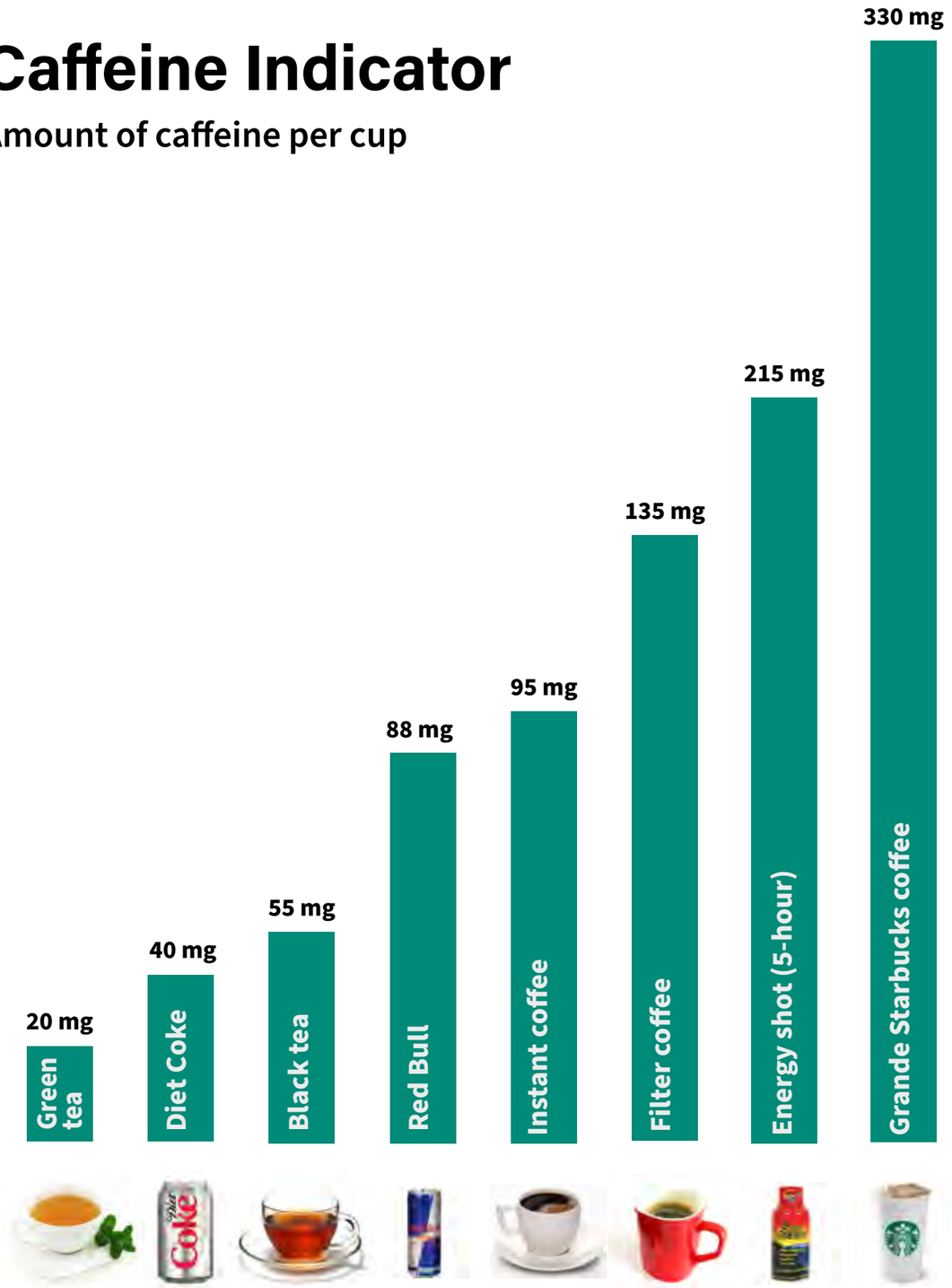
Keep an eye on their caffeine intake and, if possible, get them to avoid it completely from lunchtime as a year-round rule.

Walk your talk!

If you're reaching for a strong coffee several times daily to try and keep your energy levels up, you're impacting your own ability to sleep at night, as well as sending the wrong message on how to manage tiredness.

Caffeine Indicator

Amount of caffeine per cup



Dealing With Rejection

Experiencing rejection for the first time can be tough. Whether they've applied for an apprenticeship, university place, job or other next step, competition for places can be highly competitive and, inevitably, some applicants get turned down.

As adults, we have had many years to develop the coping mechanisms to deal with this type of disappointment.

However, this may be your child's first experience of rejection and it can feel very personal - perhaps even like it's the end of the world. But it isn't! Help your teen accept and move on from the decision, without it damaging their self-confidence or causing them-unnecessary stress and anxiety.

It's OK to feel hurt

Rejection can be hurtful and it's OK to acknowledge this. Don't dismiss their feelings by saying "everything's going to work out fine" (even though it will and this is good advice in the long-term) before allowing them chance to express how they feel and perhaps even cry or rant a bit. That said, it's important they feel reassured that rejection does not define them as a failure.

Disappointment is an element of life, the key is to take stock, learn any lessons that could be helpful in the future and move on. This is part of building resilience - the ability to bounce back from setbacks rather than being overwhelmed by them.

Helping them regain control

Encourage your child to request feedback about any rejections. Whilst not all companies offer this, many do. Feedback will help your child understand the reasons for not being successful and will help them improve for future interviews and applications. Companies have a lot of experience in providing feedback and it is likely to be sensitive and constructive.

Reduce the power of rejection

Try to encourage your child to research and apply for more than one opportunity at a time. If possible, aim for several applications concurrently. This way your child isn't placing all their eggs in one basket and thinking their entire future depends on one pathway. Instead, if one doesn't work out, they've still got open possibilities with others.

This is easy to achieve with university applications because they'll apply for five universities via UCAS and that's an automatic part of the process. It's less obvious with jobs and apprenticeships, especially as applications for these need to be made individually and each one takes a lot of work. However, where possible, they should invest the time and make multiple applications, aiming to keep their options open - it will serve them well in the long term.

Reframing

How we perceive a situation will have a significant impact on how we feel about it. Using the reframing technique of looking at a situation from a more positive angle can help them feel better and improve their mindset, even though the situation itself has not changed at all.

This can also be helpful in highlighting that no situation, however appealing, is perfect and that there are always some drawbacks. For example, they may have missed out on an apprenticeship opportunity that they felt was 100% the sure route to their success. They can take a notepad and jot down all the ways they felt it was right. Then clean the slate and write down any ways it wasn't perfect. Did it mean moving some distance from home? Was it especially competitive and likely to be tiring to keep up? Were there elements of the job/training they were less keen?

Discover more

- University Rejections

Long term viewpoints

There's a lot to be said for living in the here and now, but sometimes teens need to look ahead to the future. There can be many routes to the same destination, so they should keep an eye on their long term ambitions (and what they'd like to achieve) and remain flexible about the different ways of getting there.

Relaxation

Highly charged emotions are tiring and elevate stress response hormones in the body. Try to get your teen to counter this by:

- doing something physical to burn off excess energy and release natural feel-good hormones;
- taking their mind off their disappointment by doing something that makes them laugh (and thereby literally changing the chemical balance in the body);
- doing something relaxing and soothing - perhaps cooking, taking a bath, listening to music;
- practising breathing techniques.

Talking it through

It may not be to you! A sibling, grandparent, family friend or friend at school could offer a sympathetic ear. Expressing worries out loud can sometimes make them feel less significant than when they're playing on loop in the mind. The act of vocalizing and explaining feelings to another can also help put them in perspective, whereas internalizing and thinking negative thoughts over and over can encourage them to feel bigger. Your teen needs to remember they control their thoughts - not the other way around and talking through their feelings can help crystalize this by restructuring thoughts into coherent sentences.

Timing

Bear in mind that letters of decline often happen in the lead up to examinations. Try your best to prevent this from having a negative impact on your child's study or revision efforts by using some of the relaxation ideas mentioned on the previous page.

Don't forget!

Do not encourage negative self-talk. Instead, try to get them to talk through what they have learned from the experience and what they might do differently next time.

When to Get Support

Don't be tough on yourself and expect to have all the solutions for your child's needs. It's absolutely fine to call on professionals to help you help them. Professional support includes more than counsellors and psychiatrists (although both these approaches can be helpful). There's a range of professional options available including:

1. 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;
2. 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);
3. 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;
4. 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 and a good place to start might be visiting your GP.

AnxietyUK

NHS

mind for better mental health

SAMARITANS

A-Z of Support

	Organisation	Contact
Anxiety UK	**Anxiety UK** Support and help for those who have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition	Website
AtaLoss	**At a loss** The UK's signposting website for the bereaved. They can help you find bereavement services and counselling	Website
Beat Eating disorders	**BEAT** A website dedicated to Eating Disorders - including support for parents / carers who may be affected by an eating disorder	Website
CALM	**CALM** A helpline for men in the UK who are down or have hit a wall for any reason, who need to talk or find information and support.	Website
Mental Health Foundation	**Mental Health Foundation** Support and advice to help people understand, protect and sustain their mental health	Website
mind	**Mind** A site with support and advice for parents who are worried about a young person's mental health or supporting a young person who's living with a mental health problem.	Website
No Panic	**No Panic** No Panic offers advice, support, recovery programs and help for people living with phobias, OCD and any other anxiety-based disorders	Website

	Organisation	Contact
NSPCC	**NSPCC** Support and tips to help parents keep children safe. From advice on children's mental health to staying safe online	Website
PAPYRUS	**PAPYRUS** A charity dedicated to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of positive mental health and emotional wellbeing in young people	Website
Place 2Be	**Place 2 Be** Advice and resources for parents and carers to help support their child or young person's wellbeing	Website
Rethink Mental Illness.	**Rethink Mental Illness** Aims to improve the lives of people severely affected by mental illness through their network of local groups and services	Website
SAMARITANS	**Samaritans** A registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress or struggling to cope	Website
SANE	**SANE** SANE has a range of services to help improve the quality of life for anyone affected by mental illness.	Website
YOUNGMiNDS	**Young Minds** Lots of practical advice and tips on supporting young people. There's also a Parent Helpline if you're worried about a child or young person	Website

Final Words

As a parent, what you say – and how you say it – can have a powerful impact on how your teen feels about themselves and their future. Even the most well-meaning encouragement can sometimes be misinterpreted as pressure. That's why focusing on effort rather than outcomes can be so helpful. Praising the things they've already achieved – "I'm proud of how hard you worked on that" – helps build confidence without setting expectations that might feel overwhelming.

Being a calm, consistent presence in their lives is one of the most valuable things you can offer. Make time for regular chats – nothing heavy, just a chance to check in. When open conversations are part of everyday life, your teen is far more likely to come to you when they're struggling.

Above all, remember that life isn't perfect – and that's OK. Stress and setbacks are part of growing up. But with the right tools, teens can learn to manage these challenges and develop resilience along the way. You don't have to do it all alone – and neither do they. There's plenty of support out there, so don't hesitate to reach out when you need it.

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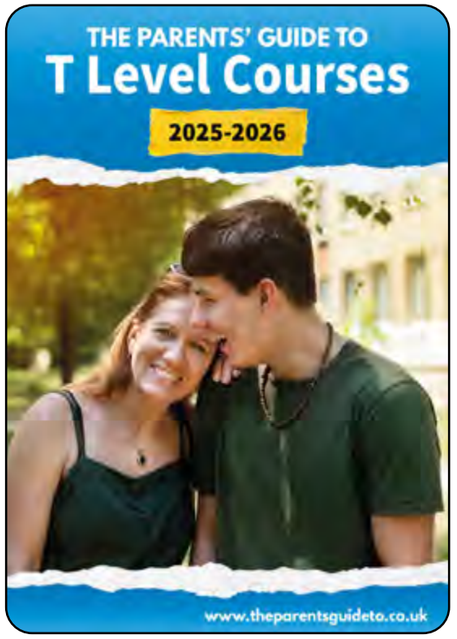

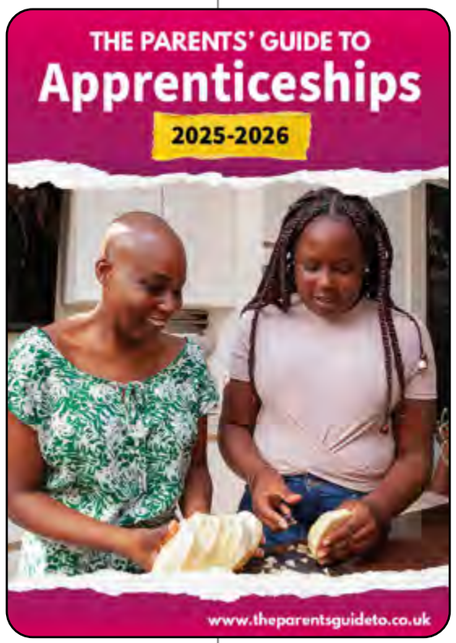

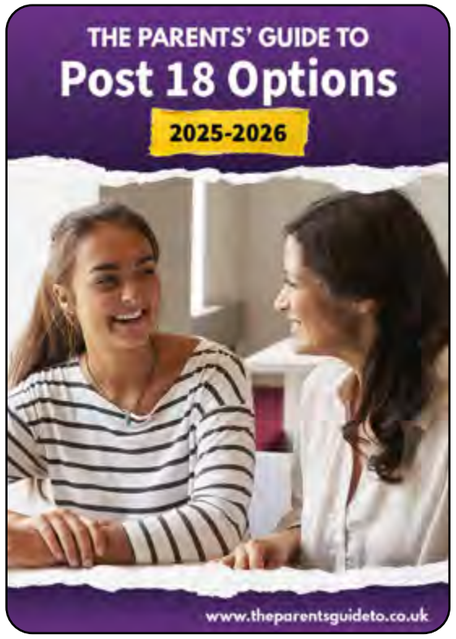

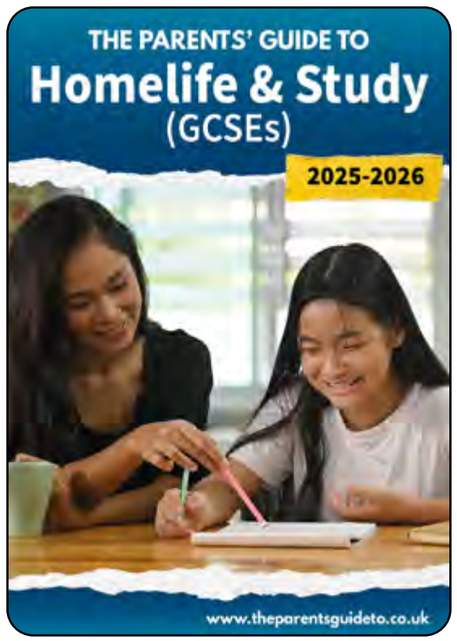

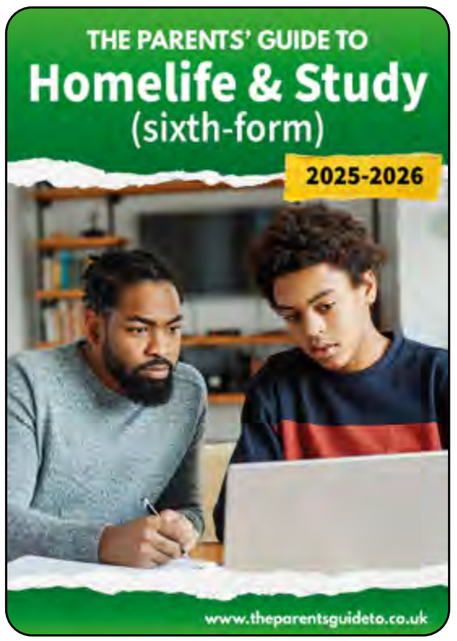

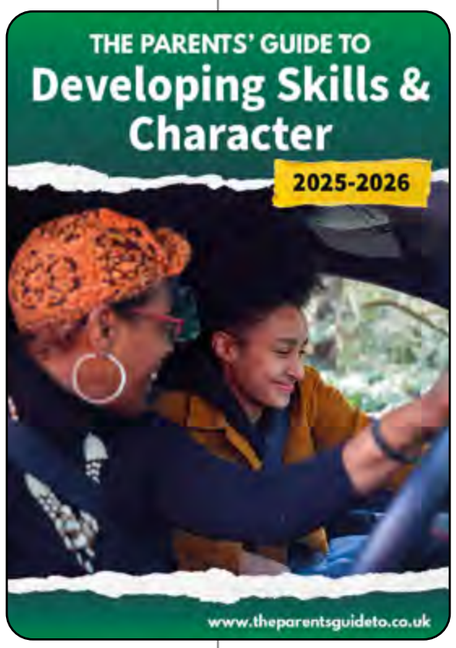

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