

Preparing for GCSEs can be a challenging time for the entire family. Children are put under pressure to succeed and you as parents try everything you can to help your son/daughter do just that. However, there are many of you who are unsure of how to proceed. Maybe you aren't comfortable helping out because you are not knowledgeable in a specific subject or are confused with the current complicated GCSE system that resembles nothing like the exams you took. Or maybe you did not even do GCSE exam and believe that you can't offer assistance to your child.

Parents don't let your self-doubt stop you from showing interest in your child's education. Many studies have shown students with parents who take on a more active role in their education generally do better in exams than students whose parents don't. And the great news is that you don't need to be an expert to become involved. There are a variety of ways you can help to prepare your child for their GCSE exams. You can play a huge part in motivating your child just by giving unwavering support, offering constant encouragement and showing interest.

### **Understanding The Importance Of GCSE Revision**

Proper revision is essential to achieving great GCSE results. Even a super-genius would have to have some knowledge of the subject in order to pass an exam. So one of the very first things you need to do is explain the importance of revision to your son/daughter.

Revision benefits:

- *Reinforces what they have learnt.*
- *Identifies weak points and problems areas.*
- *Helps them gain a solid understanding of the subject.*
- *Bolsters exam confidence.*

It is also important to not leave revision to the last minute. The earlier your child starts their GCSE revision, the better. Many students underestimate the time needed for proper revision; this adds more stress and anxiety to the situation because they begin to overextend themselves to make up for the lack of time.

Here is a simple way to work out the least amount of revision time needed: For one GCSE subject, allow 1 hour of revision per topic. Therefore, the least amount of revision time needed for one subject is "1 hour X total number of topics". If a subject covers 50 topics, then that subject would require at least 50 hours of revision time. If your child is doing 8 subjects, he/she would need at least 400

hours of studying. Then, set aside 3 hours every day for revision. Your son/daughter will therefore need to start revising at least 5 months before the GCSE exams to cover all topics.

Do this exercise with your child to let them appreciate the number of hours it will take to revise their subjects and understand why it will benefit them to begin GCSE revision at the earliest possible time.

### **Planning GCSE Revision Time**

Teenagers are not known to be the most organised individuals but effective revision first begins with organisation. So parents, hopefully you are more organised than your child and can assist them with planning their revision time.

There is the erroneous belief that “serious revision” equates to studying hours on end. Marathon studying sessions are certainly not recommended. Encourage 30-45 minute revision sessions with short breaks in between. Optimally, students should study for no more than 4 hours per day. Studying for long stretches of hours is counterproductive because the brain will become tired, they will experience difficulty in focusing and increasingly less and less information will be retained. The fundamental principle to revising is to do it habitually and constantly, little chunks at a time. A student who studies for 2 hours 7 days a week would be much better off than a student who studies 10 hours straight on Saturday and Sunday.

Revision planning begins with creating a revision timetable. To be consistent, students should strive to study at least 5 days of the week. On weekdays, this time would be after school and the choice is theirs on weekends. Advise your child to breakdown the subjects by topics; so revising Mathematics on Tuesday night becomes revising quadratic equations instead. Give priority to the subjects and topics that are most difficult; this means placing them early on in the timetable and allowing more revision time.

Sometimes, it's good to plan a night off. This can be every other week. On these “off” nights, let your child have fun and relax. Maybe watch a movie or have a friend over. Allow them the opportunity to be stress-free in this stressful GCSE period.

### **Weekly Revision Feedback**

At the end of each study week, you can have conversations about the revision progress. Make it interesting so that it doesn't feel like an interrogation; maybe get coloured note cards – red, yellow and green. On the red cards, have them right down the topics that are still difficult, on the yellow cards the topics they

are beginning to understand but still need more revising, and on the green cards the topics that they are really comfortable with. At the end of every week, have your child assess their progress, creating new colour cards for topics. Make sure to praise them when a topic goes from a red card to a yellow card and from a yellow card to a green card.

Encourage them to do as many past papers as possible. If you are able, offer to correct these “mock exams” using the marking schemes.

### **Revision in the Home Environment**

Most revising will be done at home; having a good environment while studying will help your child stay focused. Ensure that they have a quiet and private place in the home to revise. A simple desk and chair in their room can suffice. Or it can even be at the dining table. Whatever space it is, make it their private zone at revision time and keep the distractions to a minimum.

If there are other siblings in the house, ensure that they respect the revision time of the sibling doing their GCSEs. Keep the television turned down, no loud music and certainly no arguments. To show solidarity, you can make this a quiet period for the entire family – reading books or having other children study too.

You will also need to equip your child with the proper revision instruments. Here is a list:

- *Stationery – pens (GCSE examiners prefer black), pencils, rubbers, sharpeners, rulers, and highlighters*
- *Special tools for certain subjects e.g. a compass, protractor and calculator for Mathematics*
- *Time keeper – watch, clock and alarm clock*
- *Access to a computer with internet*
- *Printer with paper*
- *Dictionary*
- *Textbooks*
- *Online GCSE Revision access*
- *GCSE exam past papers*
- *Post it notes*
- *Pin board*
- *Note cards*
- *Notebooks*
- *Files and folders*
- *Personal Organiser or daily journal*
- *Calendar*

## GCSE Revision Styles and Methods

Revision boils down to personal preference – what works best for the individual. It is not just about reading a textbook. There are many interesting revision methods your child can include in their daily routine. People learn in different ways and revision methods should reflect their preference.

You've watched your son/daughter grow up and know their personality. This would give you an idea of what type of learner he/she is. Below are the three main types of learners. You and your child can determine which group he/she belongs to and guide them to the best revision methods to suit.

Visual learners: they learn better by sight; by seeing and observing. They prefer:

- *Images*
- *Drawings*
- *Diagrams*
- *Charts*
- *Graphs*
- *Colour*

Best revision tools: cue cards, timelines, notes on a pin board, colour coded revision notes, mind maps, creating drawing of topics, practice diagram labelling, highlighting and annotating important keywords, facts and definitions.

Auditory learners: they learn better by hearing the information. They prefer:

- *Watching and listening to lectures and lessons*
- *Hearing explanations and answers*
- *Listening to recorded notes*
- *Talking out loud to themselves or to other people about the topics*

Best revision tools – reading the notes out loud, watching and listening to videos and podcasts, recording their own notes and playing it back, discussions with study group, discussion with parents about a topic, and making a song or rhyme about the revision notes.

Kinaesthetic learners: they learn better with practical and hands-on experience. They prefer:

- *Writing things down*
- *Creating models and diagrams*
- *Being active while studying*
- *Explanations with real life examples*

Best revision tools – writing revision notes over and over, creating revision flash cards, taking walks and talking about the topics, study group discussions, revising with real life examples e.g. when revising force = mass X acceleration they can picture an object falling off a tall building, using mnemonics, and taking part in activities that involve the subject such as visiting a coastal area for the Geography topic, Coastal Landscapes.

If these revision tools are unfamiliar to you, a simple online search will provide you with all the information you need to understand them.

### **Healthy Child, Healthy Mind, Productive Revision**

Stress and anxiety from GCSE preparation can take a mental, physical and emotional toll on your child. To combat this, you need to feed them the right foods and encourage them to be active individuals. A healthy mind and body will also help them be focused in school and concentrate when it is revision time.

Here are a few guidelines to follow:

- *Keep junk foods and sweet drinks to a minimum. (None would be best but we are talking about teenagers.)*
- *Plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.*
- *Adequate protein servings from healthy sources such as fish, peas and nuts.*
- *Lots of water to stay hydrated.*
- *Avoid high-caffeine products. At their age, it can do more harm than good.*
- *Daily exercise - this can be short walks or playing their favourite sport. Exercise gets oxygen flowing to the brain, which will help them relax and think clear.*
- *They need adequate sleep, which means never burning the midnight oil.*

Remember, the brain works best when it is relaxed, happy, entertained, inspired, engaged challenged, and most importantly loved.

### **Final Tips for GCSE Revision**

Everyone falls behind sometimes, and feel demotivated, overwhelmed and lost. Be quick to notice these signs in your child and offer help; don't make the situation worse by berating them or calling them lazy.

Look out for these indicators that your child is too stressed:

- *They talk less.*

- *Show less interest in the things they love.*
- *Have mood swings.*
- *Not eating as much as usual.*
- *Sleeping problems.*

Have an open door policy where they can talk to you at any time. Listen to their concerns. Let them talk freely about their issues and struggles. Take their minds off GCSE for a moment by taking them out, letting them do the things that they enjoy or cooking their favourite meals. Reassure them that you love them unconditionally.

Here are some more tips to help minimise your child's anxiety:

- *Always encourage your child to ask for help at school on any parts of their work they do not understand.*
- *Be positive even if they aren't.*
- *Stay supportive.*
- *End every conversation on a good note.*
- *Cut back on their chores to afford them sufficient study time.*
- *Offer praise and treats when they have reached revision milestones.*
- *Have regular one and one conversations. Let your child talk more than you and be attentive.*
- *Regularly inquire if they need anything of you.*

### **GCSE Revision In The Final Days**

Get your own timetable to know the dates and times of each exam. Avoid disagreements and arguments in the days leading up to the exams, the less stressed they are, the better relaxed they will be. Don't grill them after exams. A smile and a simple "How did it go?" will do.

Remember GCSE is only one part of their life. Prepare to support them in their life's goal regardless of the result. At this moment, your son/daughter may have a lot of insecurities and uncertainties, always assure them that you will love and support them no matter what.