

## Title: How can I help my child with exam stress?

Author: By Jayne Thompson, Programmes Manager PTA NI

**Summary: OMGoodness, is it really exam time again? There are many ways to help your child tackle exam stress. We have some top tips and give you the tried and tested AEROS method to help the whole family survive exam season at school.**

### Warning! Signs of stress

Being the mum of a 19- and 17-year old, I am rather familiar with the early signs of exam pressures: late night cramming, missed meals, sugar fixes, mood swings and being unusually irritable!

I have found that while we cannot fully alleviate the pressures, as parents we can play a vital part in helping our children to manage them. If we can nip it in the bud so that pressures don't manifest as stress, then it's a win-win situation. It's better for the child going through exams, and also for the whole family who experience the knock-on effect of exam time.

Remember – pressures are normal and can be healthy, whereas stress is what you want to avoid.

### Preparing the AEROS way

I am a huge chocolate fan, so here's my choc-themed take on helping our children prepare better mentally and physically for upcoming GCSEs, AS-levels or A-levels.

A mint AERO is my favourite if you are interested! But seriously, these are simple things that we as parents can do to help prevent normal exam pressures turning into stress:

- **A** is for Appetite - has your child's appetite changed so they are craving 'rubbish' food? In order to fuel the brain and body, it's important prior and during exams that we ensure our children have regular healthy meals starting with breakfast. Tip – I try to have dinner ready for when our daughter gets home from school at 5pm. This is to prevent junk food intake when she arrives home hungry.
- **E** is for Exercise - children need at least 20 minutes of exercise a day. Tip – it's a good idea to set aside 20 mins each evening for you both to go for a walk in the great outdoors and talk through with your child any worries and fears they may have.
- **R** is for Relaxation - they need time to unwind and chill, whether that's staying late after school once a week to go for coffee and shopping with friends, or kicking a ball around in the park. This allows the brain to recharge and prepare for the next revision drive.
- **O** is for Organisation. It's important that we create a space in the home for each child to study in peace. This space needs to be clutter-free and in a quiet part of the house away



from the clatter of dishes and hum of the TV. An organised revision timetable detailing subject, topic and time allocated to revision is a must!

- **S** is for Sleep- it's hugely important we encourage a minimum of eight hours' sleep. If the body hasn't had a chance to recharge, it won't be fit to sustain the level of pressure young people put upon themselves during this period.

### **Tailoring your support**

Our two children are so different – one has very visible anxiety levels whereas the other appears so laid-back you wouldn't suspect they had an ounce of stress in their body; but both need equal parental support.

The first thing we did was to discuss with the teachers, with our children present, what grades they were on track to achieve, and whether or not the teacher felt those grades were matched to the ability and application of the child in question. As parents, we want the best for our children, but we must acknowledge their level of ability in each subject and not put undue stress or fear of failure on them with expectations that exceed their capability.

We asked the teachers how we could support our child in each subject and if they had any tips for revision. It is important as parents to understand our child's learning style. For example, our son prefers lots of short questions and answers, whereas our daughter is a rote learner so we bought her a whiteboard - the best revision tool we could have given her!

Our children's schools were excellent providing guidance for parents and pupils alike on preparing for exams, but guidance is of no use if we don't work together and implement it.

### **And one last thing...**

I hope you'll find AEROS useful, but I nearly forgot one of the most important points! Do NOT worry about mess in their bedroom and them forgetting to bring their dishes to the sink while exams are on. Housework and tidiness are trivial things at such times. We can charge our children double housework and a thorough tidy up during the summer, but for now, turn a blind eye to the mess and just close the door.

If you think 'AEROS', and not just the chocolate kind, it may help to alleviate some of the stress of exam time, for all the family. Hopefully, at the end of the process, your child will achieve the results they deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jayne'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, vertical stroke extending downwards from the end of the name.