

# SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD & YOUNG PERSON (CYP) WITH EXAM SEASON

Tips for your child/young person's wellbeing  
City & Hackney Mental Health Support Team



City & Hackney

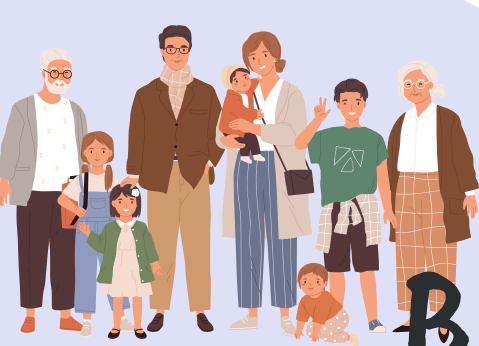


Alliance



East London

NHS Foundation Trust



# WHAT IS THIS BOOKLET ABOUT?

- Exams can be a stressful and overwhelming time for children and young people.
- This booklet is designed to help parents understand stress, anxiety and find some healthy ways to support their child or young person (CYP) get through exam season (SATs/GCSE's & A Levels)

## WHO CAN HELP MY CYP TO MANAGE STRESS?

Some people like to try apps to help themselves, others prefer to speak with someone or attend a group. All options are great, as long as it helps your CYP through their exams!

**If your CYP feels that they need support, you/they can:**

- Speak to a teacher or adult you trust - they might have access to support in school that you can try.
- Ask to be referred to the EMHP (Educational Mental Health Practitioner) who comes to the school regularly. EMHPs can provide advice, resources, 1:1 or group sessions.
- Visit [cityandhackneycamhs.org.uk](http://cityandhackneycamhs.org.uk) to find out more about the mental health support on offer locally.



# WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STRESS & ANXIETY?

Stress and Anxiety are normal emotions, we all experience it!



## **Stress** (Short term)

It's in response to a recognised threat.

**Symptoms: Moodiness, irritability, dizziness, being overwhelmed.**



## **Anxiety** (Can linger)

It is a feeling that can occur as a reaction to stress or without any obvious trigger.

**Behaviour maintains the anxiety and can lead to further symptoms, such as restlessness, sweating and feeling unease.**

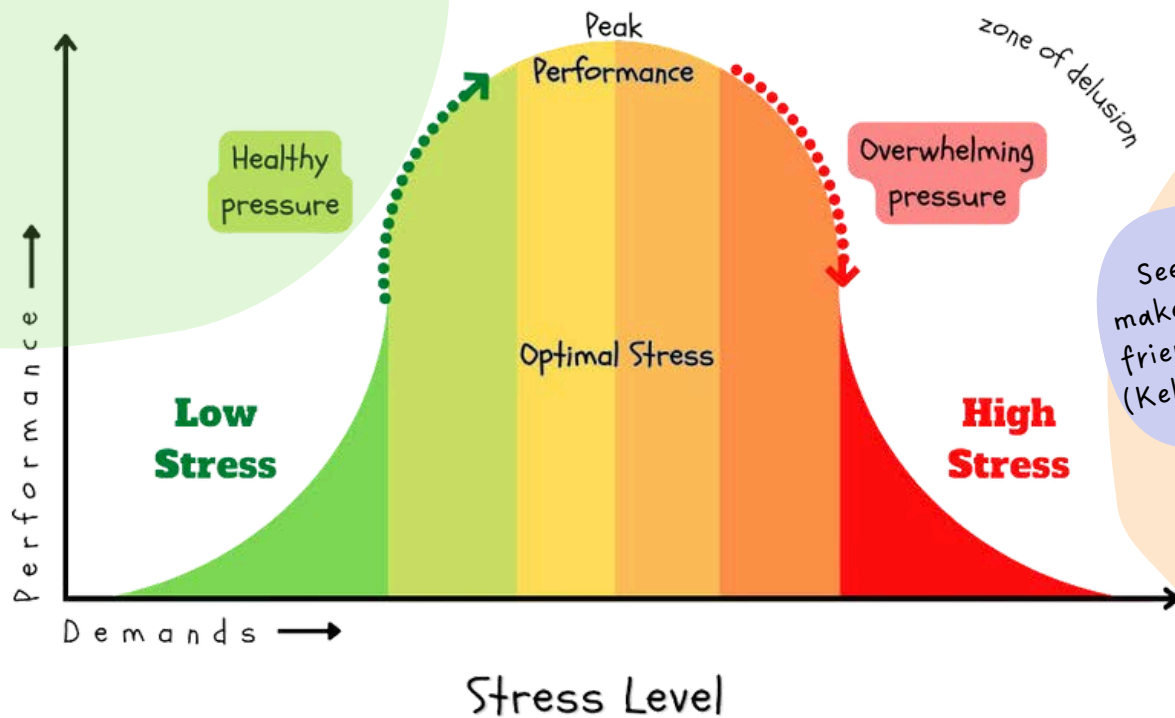
# WHAT SIGNS SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR IN MY CYP?

Every child and young person is different, but below are common symptoms and behaviour students present.

- Worry a lot
- Feel tense
- Have headaches and stomach pains
- Not sleeping well
- Being irritable
- Lose interest in food or eat more than normal
- Not enjoy activities they previously enjoyed
- Be negative and have a low mood
- Feel hopeless about the future



# IS EXAM STRESS BAD FOR MY CYP?



Low	Moderate	Optimal	High	Too high
Inactive Bored Unchallenged	Engaged Focused Motivated	Confident In control Productive	Distracted Fatigue Overwhelm	Exhaustion Anxiety Burnout
"I wish I had more to do!"	"I'm feeling focused & energised"	"Now I'm really in the zone"	"I feel anxious & unfocused"	"I can't take this anymore"

Here we have a “stress performance curve”. This curve demonstrates that a small amount of stress can motivate us to revise and prepare for an exam. However, too much stress can lead to burnout and a low performance.

When it comes to exams, we want our CYP to aim for the yellow zone of “optimum stress”. This is when your child or young person is not completely inactive (not doing any revision or preparation) but also aren’t completely exhausted and overwhelmed.

# WHAT CAUSES EXAM STRESS?

Stress is a natural response to pressure. Exams can be stressful on their own but other things might cause you to feel worse (external stressors):

## Fear of failure

CYP may see their self-worth as attached to our test scores or grades, which puts more pressure on themselves.

## Pressure from others

CYP may want to please others (e.g. parents, carers, teachers) who are important to us, which can put more pressure on us

## Lack of preparation

If CYP are anxious, they may avoid studying, procrastinate and become distracted which then increases their stress, which becomes a negative cycle

## Worrying how you'll feel and perform during the exam itself

e.g. "I will forget everything I know", "I won't understand the questions"

## Comparing yourself

CYP compare themselves to friends or past family members's results. They believe they should get the same, if not better, results.

## Worrying about the future

Many CYP worry about getting into the college/Sixth Form/university/career they want

## Having difficulties at home, or in our lives generally

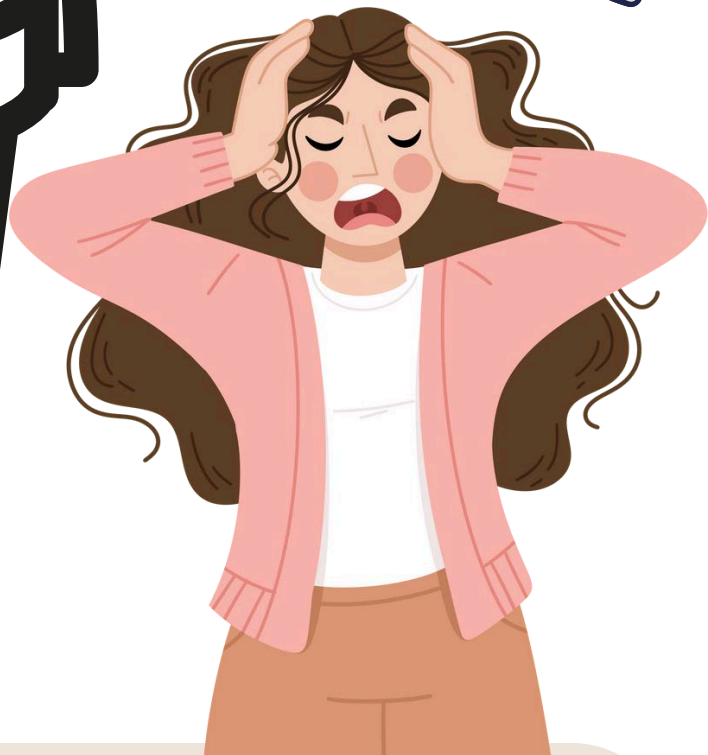
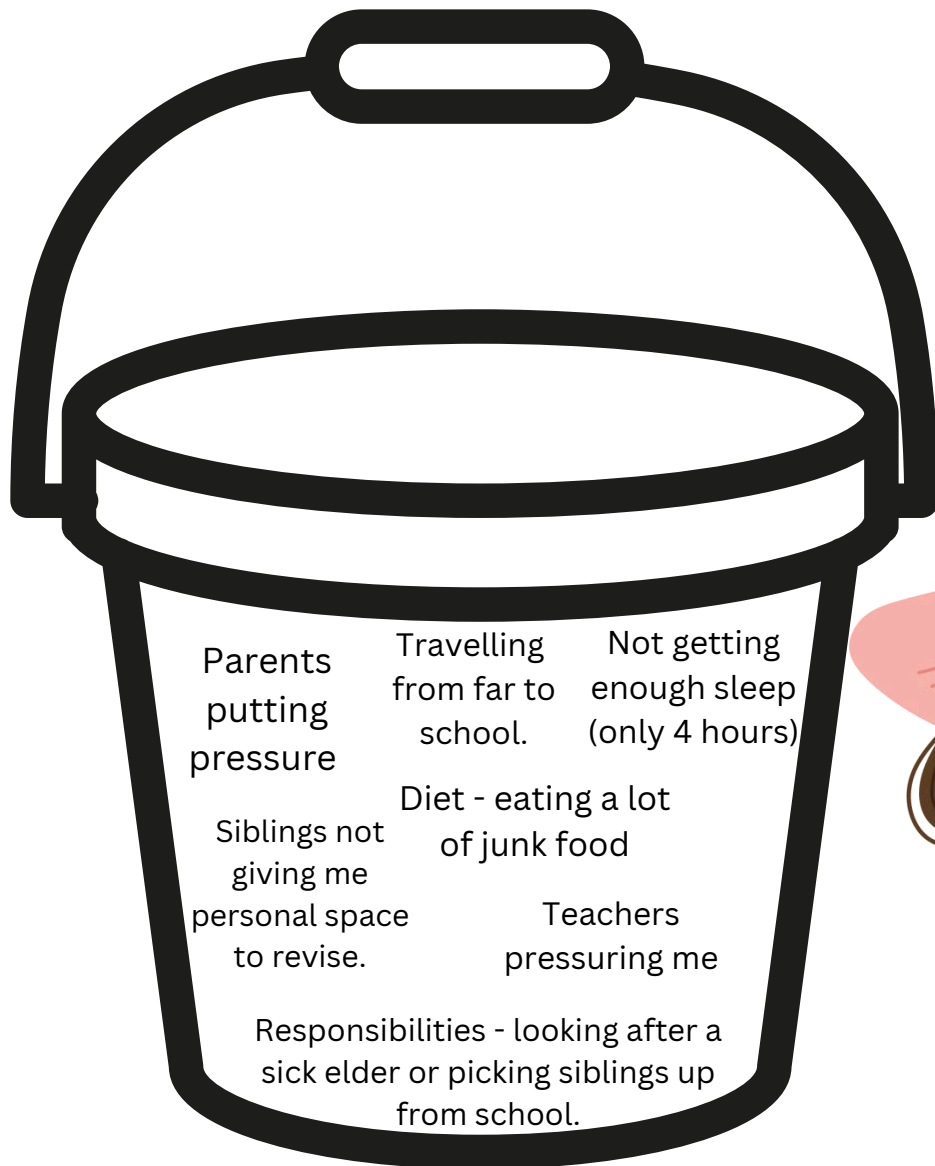
E.g. CYP may to cope with changes, family difficulties, caring for someone, experiencing illness





# WHAT IS FILLING UP YOUR CYP'S STRESS BUCKET?

Here is an example stress bucket. This young person has many stressors impacting on their wellbeing and performance to revise for exams.



## How do I cope?

- Stay up and stress about my future.
- Argue with siblings and don't get work done.
- Daydream in lessons or Avoid lessons.
- Avoid teachers or not listen to them.
- Argue with parents.
- Spend most of my time on the phone and feel rubbish

# WHAT IS FILLING UP YOUR CYP'S STRESS BUCKET?

Have a go by yourself or with your child/young person to see what is filling up their stress bucket? You will be using the worry tree to identify whether some of these stressors your child is feeling is a problem or a fear (PAGE ON WORRIES).



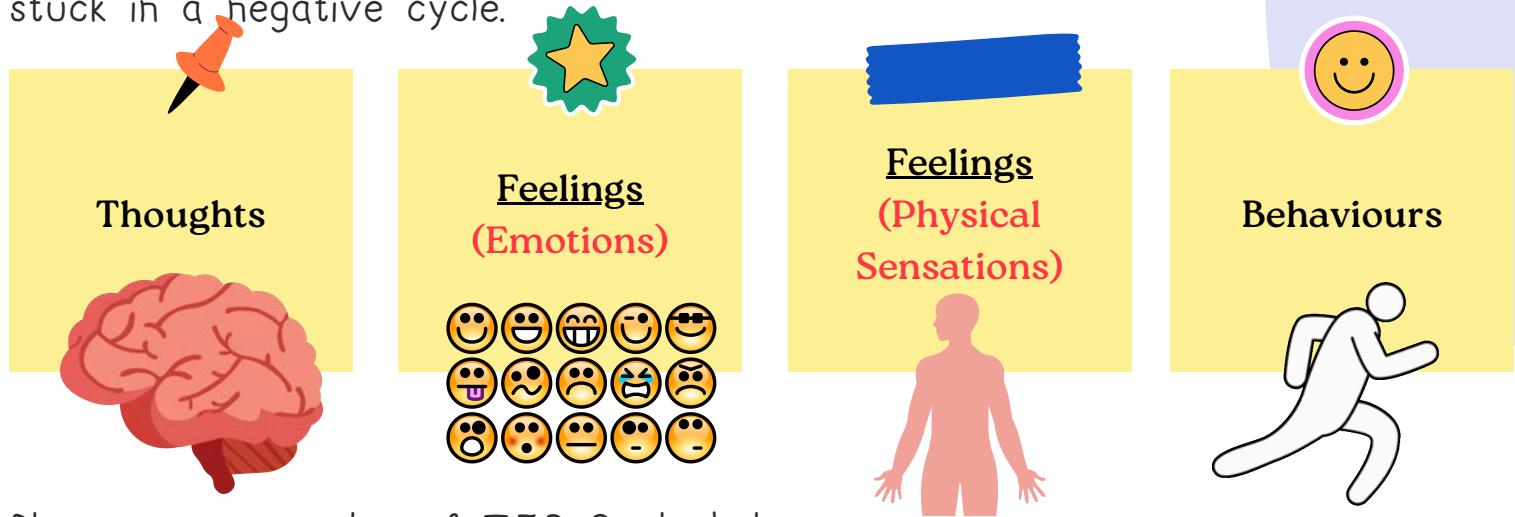
How do they cope?

# HOW ARE THESE STRESSORS IMPACTING MY CYP?

Exam stress and external stressors can impact how your child or young person thinks, feels and behaves in their day-to-day lives.

Your child's thoughts influence their feelings (emotions & physical sensations), which influences their behaviour. Their behaviour influences the outcome and whether the negative cycle continues. This is known as the Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour Cycle (T.F.B Cycle).

When exam stress and other stressors become a bit too much we get stuck in a negative cycle.



Please see examples of T.F.B Cycle below:

Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviour (T.F.B)			
Thoughts 1	Feelings 2	Physical sensations 2	Behaviours 3
"I am going to fail my exams"	Anxious	Heart palpitations	Procrastinating
"I don't know what I want to do after Sixth Form?"	Hopeless	Tight chest	sleeping too much or too little
"Everyone else will do better than me"	Irritable	Tense or painful muscles	Overworking
"My teachers are going to be disappointed in me"	Overwhelmed	Headaches	eating too much or too little
"The exam is going to be way too hard for me to pass"	Frustrated	Stomach pains	Comparing yourself
"I won't get into my firm university"	stressed	Tunnel Vision	Avoiding revising or work



# COMMON BEHAVIOURS DURING SATS, GCSE'S & A-LEVELS

These are the common behaviours and actions we tend to see from children and young people during exam season. These behaviours can impede their energy and concentration in the long term. As parents, these are things that can indicate our child is stressed, anxious or overwhelmed,



**Ignoring exams & avoiding revision**



**Setting unrealistic goals/ setting themselves to fail.**

**Blaming themselves - never feeling like they are doing enough.**



**Procrastination "I will do it later".**  
**Revises for a minute and then focuses on something else.**

**Cutting out fun treats and study breaks**

**Taking or relying on stimulants - e.g. Caffeine**



**Oversleeping or not getting enough sleep**

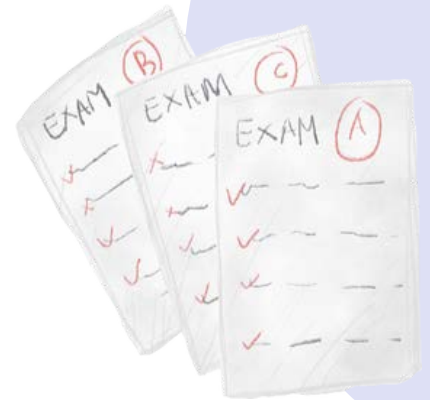
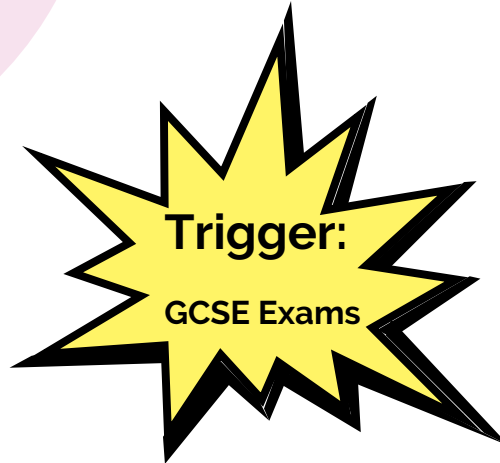
**Overeating food or not eating too much.**


**Not asking for help/arguing with others.**




# THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, BEHAVIOUR CYCLE.

Here is another specific example of the T.F.B Cycle. This student has GCSE exams (trigger) which is impacting their thoughts (negative thoughts), feelings (physical and emotional) and behaviour (maintaining stress and anxiety).



**Thoughts:**   
"I can't do this"  
"I'm going to fail"  
"I really want to go to Kings"

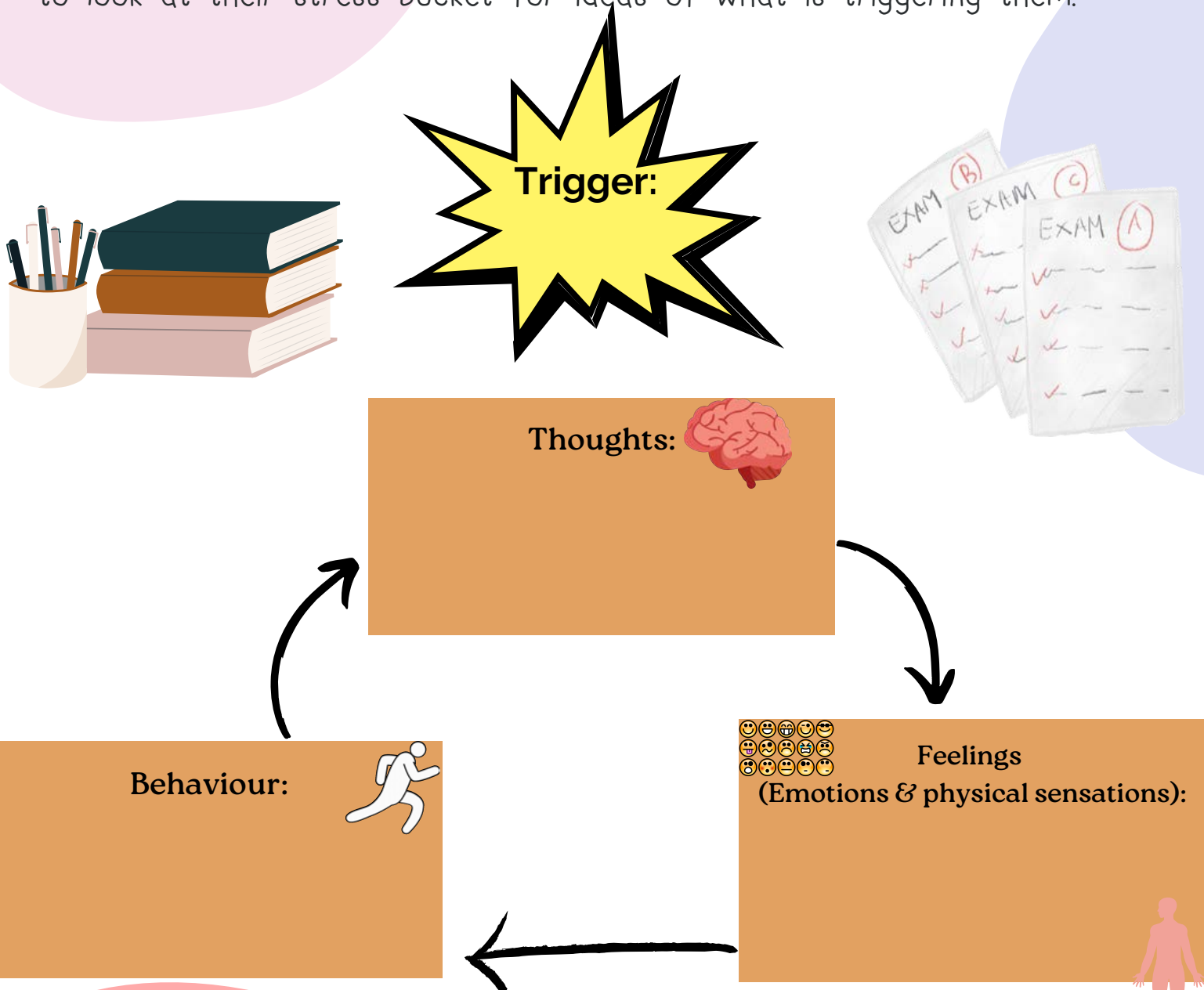
**Behaviour:**   
Crying/Breakdowns  
avoiding revision  
given up  
spending time on my phone

  
**Feelings**  
(Emotions & physical sensations):  
Heart palpitations  
Sweating  
stressed  
overwhelmed 

The child or young person is avoiding revision and spending time on their phone. Their behaviour is actually inhibiting their progress and amplifying their anxiety and stress. This then heightens the negative thoughts "I am going to fail", which causes further overwhelming symptoms (panic attacks) and further unhelpful behaviours. So how do you help your child or young person break the cycle? Firstly, we need to identify what their thoughts, feelings and behaviours are. Please complete this on the next page.

# IDENTIFYING YOUR CYP'S T.F.B CYCLE.

Have a go with your child or young person to find out what their thoughts, feelings and behaviours are. Try to focus on one area at a time. For example, an experience they had with revising (are they struggling to revise? are they scared to attend an exam?) You may want to look at their stress bucket for ideas of what is triggering them.



## Suggested questioning:

- What do you feel has been bothering you lately? (trigger)
- Would you be happy to share what thoughts are going around in your mind? What are they? Any other thoughts? (thoughts)
- How do these thoughts make your body feel? (feelings)
- What feelings were you experiencing during this situation? (feelings)
- How do you cope with this situation? What did you do? (behaviour)





# **BREAKING THE CYCLE!**

## **THINGS YOUR CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON CAN CONTROL.**

These next pages will focus on changing behaviour, supporting your CYP's thoughts & overcoming feelings.

You may need to refer back to the Stress bucket or T.F.B cycle.

# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

Breaking the cycle all starts with targeting the behaviour. If the behaviour does not change, nor will the thoughts and feelings. Therefore, we are focusing on the basics: Diet, Movement and Exercise, and Sleep!

## THE BASICS



### DIET

The choices we make about what to eat and drink can affect how we feel, but when we're stressed it can be harder to make the right choices.

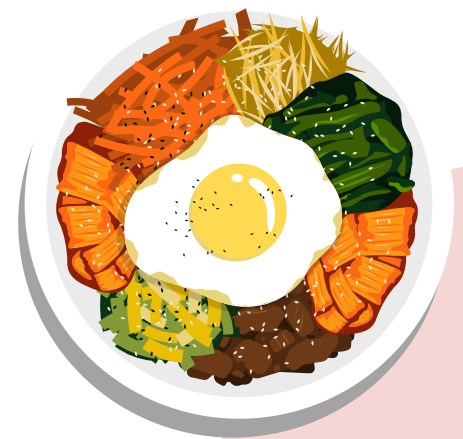
#### Choices that can make us feel worse:

- Eating too much junk food
- Taking stimulants, e.g. alcohol, caffeine
- Not eating enough



#### Choices that can make us feel better:

- Eating a balanced diet
- Staying hydrated by drinking plenty of water
- Making sure we eat enough
- Eating/drinking natural sugars (fruit)
- Eat slow-burning-energy foods (e.g. pasta, fruit, veg)





# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

## THE BASICS

### MOVEMENT & EXERCISE

Lack of movement or exercise can leave your CYP feeling **tired** and **unmotivated**, but **staying active** can help to reduce their stress. This includes going outside to get clean, fresh air.

This doesn't have to be a workout, it could be:

- Walking a slightly longer route to school
- Tidying your room (clean room, clear mind)
- Playing active games
- Stretching
- Gardening
- Meditation/yoga
- Praying
- Riding a bike
- Playing a sport
- Going for 5-30 minute walks
- Going to the gym
- Going to a dance/zumba class



# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

## THE BASICS

zzzz  
SLEEP



Lots of us don't get as much sleep as our bodies actually need.  
Teenagers need about **8 - 10 hours of sleep** every night!

### Top tips for sleep:

- . Make sure you get fresh air, daylight and are active enough during the day to help enable you to sleep
  - . Try to have a relaxing night time routine.
- . Limit your screen time an hour before bed & leave your phone out of reach. Also, dim the lighting in your room. Reducing artificial light allows your brain to communicate to your body to release **melatonin (sleeping hormone)**. This hormones allows your body to prepare to sleep and recover from the day. However, if your CYP is on their phone, this prevents melatonin from being released. Overall, this impacts sleep and makes them feel restless.
- . Have a Bedtime routine. For example, start to dim your bedroom light at 8PM. Do your skincare, write down your thoughts in your thought diary and read a book in bed. You may notice you start falling asleep around 8:50pm in time for your 9PM bedtime.

- . Try and stick to the same wake up time each day (e.g. Wake up: 7AM & Sleep time: 9PM)



- . Avoid napping during the day.
- . Try some mindfulness/relaxation exercises if you can't fall asleep.

# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

## REVISION TIPS!

### STRATEGIES TO REVISE

When many children and young people think of revision, they envision a tedious, dreadful process. For example locking themselves away in a room and revising for 10 hours. This is unrealistic and unpleasant for anyone to do. The following tips below demonstrate some quick tips.

#### Revision Timetable!



#### Schedule breaks



#### avoid distractions

#### Change your working environment



Reward yourself  
(sweet treat, day out, phone call with friend etc.)

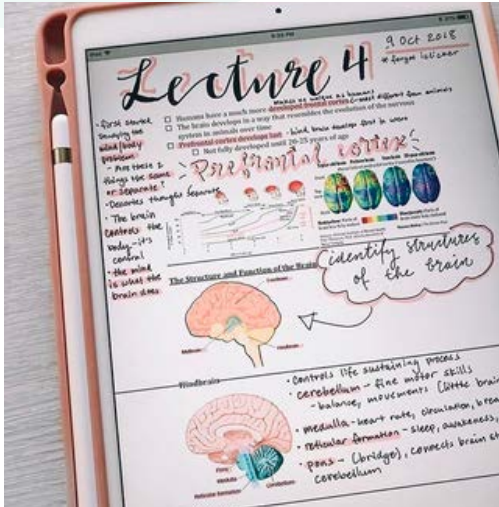


Some children and young people are still unaware of how to revise in a healthy way. In addition, some children and young people are unsure which method of revision suits their learning style. Therefore, your CYP should try out different methods of revision to see which best suits their learning style and makes it easier for them to learn.

# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

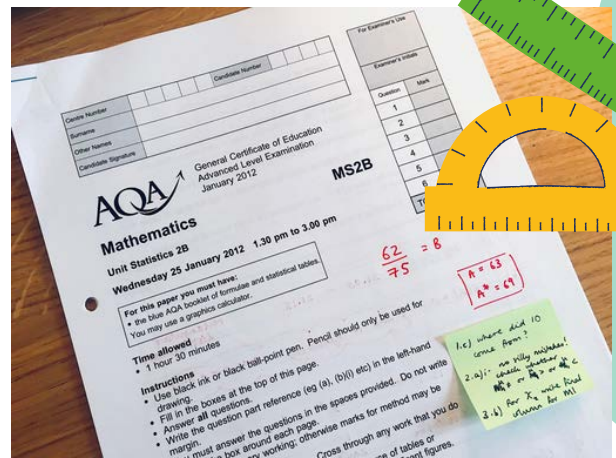
## HOW TO REVISE?

As previously mentioned, some children and young people are unaware as to how to revise. There are different methods that work for certain types of learners (E.g. visual learners). It's all trial and error. CYP will be testing their revision skills from SATS all the way to A-Levels or higher education (University, Apprenticeships & Jobs).



### Revision notes:

Read, highlight important parts of the revision textbook and write it into notes in your notebook or iPad. This can help with memorising.



### Past Papers!!!!:

#### Highly recommended!!!

They help you understand what you're strong at and what you need to improve on.

Similar questions come up - you'll have an idea of what to expect at times.

You can find past papers for your child online via google (e.g. AQA Maths exam past paper)



# STUDY



# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

## HOW TO REVISE?

These are further ways for your child or young person to revise for their exams. Flashcards can be bought for cheap in a pound store or Amazon. A3 Paper can also be bought at a local store or possibly given by your child or young person's school.



### Flashcards:

Summarise revision text and memorise flashcards and test yourself.

Colour code topics/subjects (e.g. English - Yellow & Maths - blue)



### Revision Posters:

Helps you to memorise and visualise the information. Helps you visually relocate information you need for an exam question.

This helps visual learners.



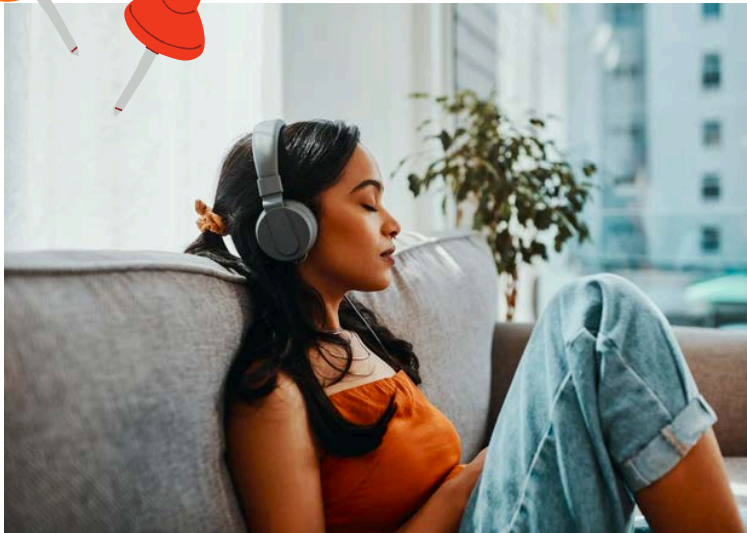
# STUDY



# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

## HOW TO REVISE?

Here are other ways that your child or young person can revise. Remember, they can stick to one method or use multiple. It is based on their learning style and what suits them best.



### Listen to your revision notes:

Record yourself saying your revision notes and listen to them before bed or on a run/doing chores.



### Collaborative Study:

Call a friend and speak about what you have learnt. Test each other. Make it fun!



# STUDY

# BREAKING THE CYCLE!

## HOW TO REVISE?

Revision timetables are not mandatory. They do not work for everyone. However, they do work for some people and provide a baseline.

A timetable should look something like this. It states which days your child or young person is revising, how long, when their break is and what their reward should be for revising. Remember: it is important that your CYP rewards themselves for studying.

Revision Timetable	4:30-5:15pm (45 minutes)	5:15-5:30 (15 minute break)	5:30-6:15pm (45 minutes)	Reward
Monday	English	Break	Spanish	Go to the corner shop and buy some sweets
Tuesday	Maths	Break	Chemistry	Watch an episode of Stranger Things
Wednesday	Biology	Break	Sociology	Go to Nandos with family/friend

## CHECK LIST

A revision checklist or tally chart might work better for your CYP.

### SUBJECTS

English. |||| |||

Maths

Science

History |||

RE

Geography ||||

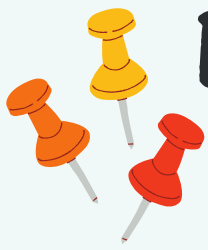
Design and Technology

## TOP TIPS:

Remember it is okay for your child to have days off from revision. We want them at a optimal stress level (yellow area).

If they feel guilty for not revising, validate their feelings, but remind them of all they have achieved and done so far. Also, you can even say affirmations together. "I am smart, strong, hardworking and deserve this day off".





# BREAKING THE CYCLE!



## WORRIES

You may notice that your child or young person still has a lot of worries and negative thoughts. These thoughts can prevent them from progressing or causes further issues. Therefore, it is a good idea to understand what the worry is and identifying whether the worry is a “Problem” or a “Fear”.

### Problem

Practical, happening now or definitely going to happen soon.  
You have to find a solution to move forward.



### Fear

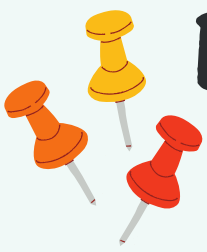
Hypothetical, may or may not happen, often about the future, out of our control.



Please see the following examples to understand the difference between a fear and a problem! And how it can be both!

The thing I am worrying about	Problem	Fear
I am going to fail my exams		✓
I am not sure how to revise/retain the information	✓	
I feel so tired and sleepy that I can't concentrate. I am going to fail,	✓	✓





# BREAKING THE CYCLE!



## WORRIES

If you catch your child worrying, you can use the worry tree to identify if it's a fear or a problem, and how to solve it.

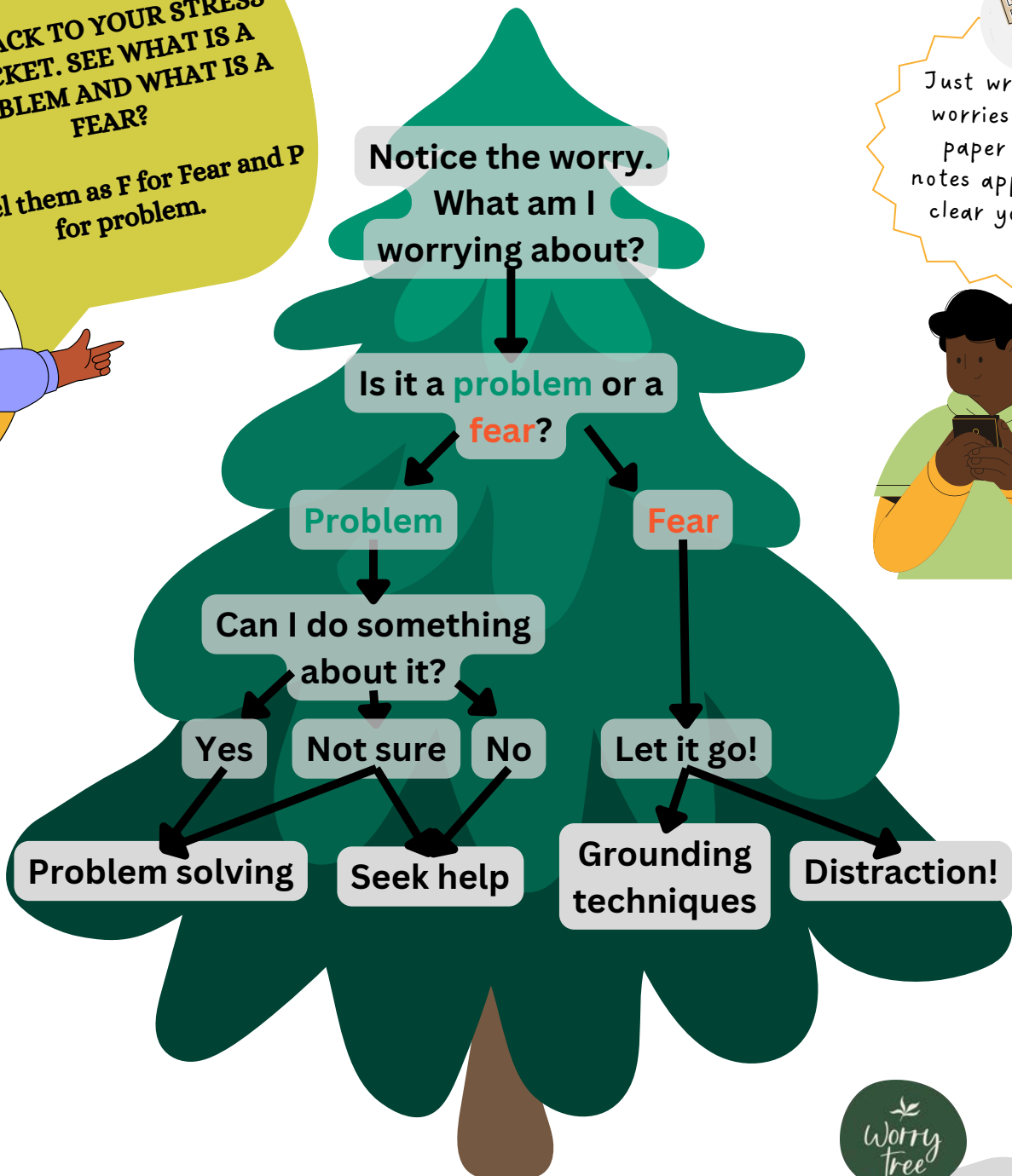
**GO BACK TO YOUR STRESS BUCKET. SEE WHAT IS A PROBLEM AND WHAT IS A FEAR?**

**Label them as F for Fear and P for problem.**



**HOT TIP**

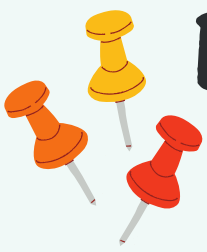
Just writing your worries down on paper or your notes app can help clear your mind



APP: The Worry Tree app can help manage overthinking and worry







# BREAKING THE CYCLE!



## WORRIES

When you have identified you are worrying about a problem you can actually do something about, you can follow the steps below to come up with a plan.



HOUSTON  
WE HAVE  
A PROBLEM



1

### Define the problem.

what exactly is the problem?

2

### Solutions

Think of all the solutions that pop into your mind.



3

### Pros and Cons

Tick the realistic and achievable solutions

5

### DO IT!!!!

Carry out the plan. What went well and what did not go so well.

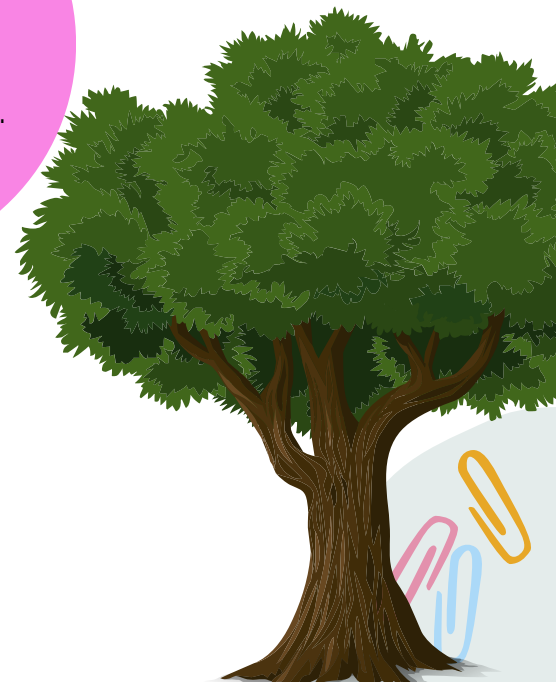


4

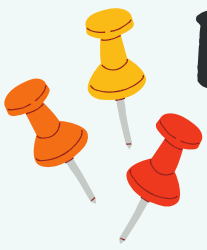


### Pick a solution

Pick one option and make a plan.







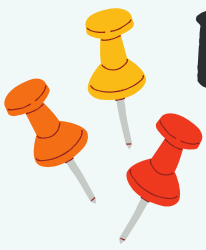
# BREAKING THE CYCLE!



## EXAMPLE WORRY TREE

Please see an example of a completed worry tree below.





# BREAKING THE CYCLE!



## WORRIES

Complete your child or young person's worry tree.

Notice the worry.  
What am I worrying  
about?

Is it a **problem** or a  
**fear**?

**Problem**

**Fear**

Can I do something  
about it?

Yes

Not sure

No

Let it go!

Problem solving:

Seek help

Grounding  
techniques:

Distraction!

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# COPING STRATEGIES!

## Grounding Techniques...

Grounding techniques can help your child or young person let go of worries and overwhelming thoughts, by enabling themselves to focus back on the present moment

Here are a couple your CYP can try out...

### 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

Connecting with the senses



### Affirmations

Having a few go-to positive phrases you can ground yourself with by repeating out loud or in your head.


I am smart and confident in what I know

Exam season will pass

I deserve rest

I am more than my grades

It will be ok



**I feel sick, panicked, tense and get headaches...**

Physical symptoms of anxiety can be uncomfortable and a sign that our “fight, flight or freeze” stress response is activated. This is a completely normal response to pressure and stress but can get in the way of your CYP from trying to focus on revision or the exam itself.

There are some techniques your CYP can use to help their bodies slow down and keep their thoughts calm.

**HOT TIP**

Practice these techniques with your child or young person!



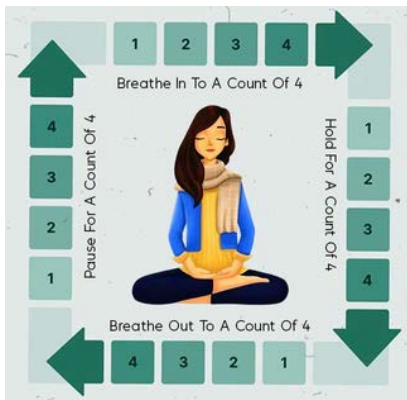
# COPING STRATEGIES!

I feel sick, panicked, tense and get headaches...

## Breathing Techniques

Slowing down and deepening our breathing counteracts the body's stress response, lowering our heart rate and blood pressure.

### Box Breathing



### Alternate Nostril Breathing



**HOT TIP**

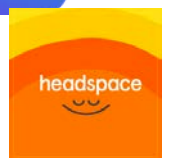
You can even use these when you're in the actual exams!

## Muscle Relaxation

Tensing and then releasing our muscle groups helps to relieve tension and relax our body



APP: The Calm app & Headspace has lots of different breathing techniques to try. Or there are some on YouTube



# OTHER WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON THROUGH EXAM SEASON?

## Make sure your child eats well

Where possible, involve your child in shopping for food. Encourage them to choose some healthy snacks. In addition, if you need further support, ask your cyp's school for support for free school meals and access to food vouchers.



## Help them study (if asked)

Ask how you can help and support with practical ideas. Ask if they need any resources to revise with.

## Talk about exam nerves

Validate their feelings, but normalise that this is a natural reaction. Remind them of the work they've put in.

## Do not add too much pressure

Listen, give support and avoid criticism. Focus on the positive: don't dwell on what went wrong.

If you need further support with this, ask other family members, teachers and Mental health workers in school.





# DIFFERENT CAREER PATHS!

As the world develops, more young people are exploring other pathways and career options that are available. This is okay.

It is good to have a talk with your young person about the university they want to go to **OR** the other options they might want to choose. University is not the only option, so do not pressure them on this.

Your young person may want to do one of the following:



**University**



**Apprenticeship**



**Gap Year - Travel**



**Open up their own business**

**Work**



It is a good idea to research what grades or qualifications they need to obtain to get into a certain university, apprenticeship or workplace. In addition, you may want to have a think of what they might do after a gap year.

# FOR MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

## Websites

- Young Minds - [www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/exam-stress/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/exam-stress/)
- The Mix - [www.themix.org.uk/work-and-study/study-and-exam-tips/the-pressure-to-do-well-in-exams-23966.html](http://www.themix.org.uk/work-and-study/study-and-exam-tips/the-pressure-to-do-well-in-exams-23966.html)
- Anna Freud - [www.annafreud.org/resources/children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing/self-care/revision/](http://www.annafreud.org/resources/children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing/self-care/revision/)
- The Student Room (for study tips) - [www.thestudentroom.co.uk/](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/)

## Services in Hackney

- City and Hackney Mental Health Support in Schools Team (MHST) - there may well be an EMHP based in your school who can support you 1:1 or in a group to cope with stress, anxiety and/or low mood
- Growing Minds - offer counselling specifically for young people from African, Caribbean and Mixed Heritage backgrounds
- School Counselling - there may be a counselling service within your school, whether this is provided by school directly or a charity like A Space. They can offer a space to talk
- Off Centre - offer counselling, art therapy, advice and information

Please speak to your school Mental Health Lead or GP to find out more



**East London**  
NHS Foundation Trust



City and Hackney MHST  
John Scott Health Centre  
220 Green Lanes  
London  
N4 2NU

Website:  
<https://cityandhackneycamhs.org.uk/>

