Beating exam stress in 7 steps – advice from a BACP counsellor

Tuesday 26 May, 2015

Many of our 42,000 members work in schools, colleges and universities, and tell us of the stress and anxiety their young clients feel at exam time. We spoke to BACP member Dawn Hastings who shared the following advice to students on how to best cope with the stresses of exams:

Keep things in perspective "Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself by expecting perfection – no one is perfect. All you can do is try your best, and however important exams may appear to be now, they certainly aren't the end of the world. In the grand scheme of things exams are only a small part of life, and so even if you don't get the results you want or need, there will be other options open to you."

Be confident "Believe in yourself! If you've worked hard and done the work, then you'll be ready for whatever is thrown at you come exam time. Try to stay relaxed and have the belief that your efforts will be rewarded. You could also try using a couple of positive statements like "I am calm and confident" or "I am well prepared for this" to help inspire you in
your exams."

Use a revision timetable "Creating a revision timetable is a great way to organise your workload. When you feel that you are losing concentration take a short break; you will then come back to your revision refreshed. Cramming all your revision into the last couple of days will only lead to added anxiety, so make sure to manage your time spent revising effectively and allow for plenty of rest time so that you can relax and rewind. "

Take time out "It is vital that you make time to relax and do the things you enjoy. Having your head in the books all day isn't going to do you any good; arrange a meet-up with friends, take a trip to the countryside, or head to your local cinema – just make sure you take your mind off of revision for a bit!"

Sleep well and eat right "It is very important that you get a good night's rest and keep a regular sleeping pattern. Don't get bogged down with late night revision sessions fuelled by numerous cups of caffeine – it's not good for you! If you find it difficult to get to sleep then you could try a relaxation exercise before going to bed; you can find lots of free downloadable podcasts on the internet. In addition to this, maintaining a healthy diet – including fruit, veg and drinking plenty of water – as well as getting enough sleep, will help keep you feeling fresh and energised going into a day of exams or revision."

Exercise "Exercise is an easy way to de-stress and has proven to increase energy levels and help with sleep, so make time to get some fresh air and stretch your legs. Whether it's a trip to the gym, a quick stroll around the park or a game of football with your friends, it's an effective way to relax and take your mind off of exams."

Talk to someone "If you're finding it difficult to cope or things become too much, talk to someone you trust about the difficulties you're facing. Most schools, colleges and universities have access to counselling services where qualified therapists are available to talk through your issues in a safe, confidential environment."

Therapy can also be accessed privately, or often through local charities and voluntary organisations, as well as for free through your GP. BACP's public website, It's Good To Talk, features a 'Find a Therapist' directory which will locate private counsellors in your area, as well as containing information on counselling and psychotherapy.

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