

Helping your child to learn at home

Help your child learn at home - take an active role

Make sure your child has somewhere comfortable to work. Ask them how you can support them with their learning. Can you encourage them to talk through key ideas in the lesson with you, for example? Talking about their learning will help your child to cement their ideas.

Help them come up with practical ideas that will help them maintain control in the period they are studying at home, such as by drawing up a schedule and asking for relevant books or materials from their teachers.

To motivate your child, encourage them to think about their goals in life and see how their learning is related to them – but also that there are usually other routes to their goal if things don't go as well as they would like.

Understand what your child is trying to achieve

If you're asking your child to understand what they need to do, it might help if you know it too so you can help plan and keep things in perspective. Ask yourself these questions:

Do I know...?

- Which subjects my child is studying?
- Do they need still to be preparing for exams?
- When are the exams (if they are occurring)?
- Has the teacher set any informal assessments that my child needs to submit?
- Does my child have the books and materials they need?
- Are there opportunities for breaks/treats?
- Are there any unavoidable commitments that they need to work around?

Talk about nerves and anxiety

Remind your child that it's normal to feel anxious. Nervousness is a natural reaction to stress (think *fight or flight*). The key is to put these nerves to positive use.

If anxiety is getting in the way rather than helping, encourage your child to practise the activities they would normally be doing in school. Are they able to mimic this at home, for example does getting dressed in the morning at their usual time help them to begin the day correctly?

This will help everything seem more familiar and help them feel in control.

Share the theory of stress with your child

Remind them that everything they feel is normal – and, most importantly, it can be managed. Don't just tell them that strategies work – try to explain *how and why* they work!

Help your child face their fears and see these activities through, rather than avoiding them.

Encourage them to think about what they know and can control. If there's something (within their control) that they don't feel confident about, encourage them to be proactive and seek.

Be flexible

Be flexible where you can. When your child is studying all day, try not to worry about household jobs left undone or untidy bedrooms.

Staying calm can help. Remember, this will not last forever.

Make sure your child eats well

A balanced diet is vital for your child's health and can help them feel well during challenging periods. High-sugar and high-caffeine foods and drinks, such as energy drinks, cola and sweets can increase anxious behaviour.

When your child is studying, suggest they try peppermint tea (or similar) as opposed to coffee.

Help your child get enough sleep

Good sleep improves thinking and concentration. Most teenagers need eight to ten hours of sleep a night. Allow time for your child to wind down between studying and going to bed. If they are using laptops or phones, there is often a “night-shift” setting that will reduce the blue light emitted from the screen (blue light is linked to keeping us awake, as it can “trick” our brain into thinking it’s daytime).

Encourage exercise

Exercise releases endorphins (hormones) that can help boost energy levels. Any exercise counts, so find try to find one your child enjoys.

Make time for treats

With your child, think about rewards for studying and getting through each week of self-study.

Rewards do not need to be big or expensive. They can include simple things like making their favourite meal or watching TV.

Top tips for parents

- Keep calm, especially when your child is worried
- Let them know you love them.
- Reflect back how they’re probably feeling, e.g. “I can tell you’re worried, and it is perfectly understandable and natural”.
- Distract them and keep busy.
- Be available to talk when they are ready to.
- Try to involve your child as much as possible in making decisions around their studies – such as when and what they eat (from a choice of good alternatives, of course!)