

11 ways

to support your child's wellbeing during senior assessment

It's been a big year for your child. COVID-19 and being part of the first cohort of Queensland students to go through the new QCE system has provided your child with plenty of opportunities to demonstrate their resilience.

With assessment and exams coming up, you may be thinking about how you can best support your child's wellbeing so that they maximise their achievements and make the most of this exciting time in their school career. These 11 tips may assist you to support your child's wellbeing as they navigate their assessment and exams.

1. Create a calm study environment

Choose a study space with your child that is separated from the hustle and bustle of the household, especially if there are younger children around. Even if you don't have a lot of space, set up a corner of a room that is just for your child's study. A quiet, calm space with natural light and fresh air will help your child to stay on track and concentrate.

2. Help establish a routine

Helping your child develop and put in place a routine can help them feel prepared, stay on top of their study and reduce their stress levels. You may want to display your child's weekly study schedule on the fridge or another spot where all the family can see it — this will help keep your child accountable and minimise the likelihood of family members disrupting them during study time.

Make sure sufficient breaks are scheduled into your child's routine – concentration is a limited resource, so 15 minute breaks every 45 to 60 minutes are really important.

3. Discuss your child's goals

Talk with your child about their goals and what they want to achieve. Support them to set clear and realistic goals. This will help them to stay focused and reduce their stress. Asking your child how they would like you to support them will remind them they're not in this alone.

4. Support your child to eat right

An important way to support your child's wellbeing while they are studying is to have healthy food available at home and encourage them to make food and drink choices that will fuel their body and mind. Great study snacks include fresh fruit, vegie sticks and raw unsalted nuts.

Teenagers often turn to energy drinks in an attempt to stay awake and alert during study sessions. Did you know that the effects of caffeine can last up to six hours and can reduce total sleep time by one hour! Encouraging your child to stay hydrated with water is much better for their long-term concentration.

Load your child up with complex carbohydrates (that slowly release energy) for breakfast, especially on the morning of exams.



5. Monitor their sleep

Teenagers need good quality sleep to function properly. Encourage and support your child to stick to a sleep schedule where they go to bed and wake up at the same time each day and get the recommended 8-10 hours of sleep each night.

Getting enough sleep is essential for your child's memory. Insufficient sleep not only decreases their ability to focus and learn properly, but it also stops the brain from effectively consolidating what they learnt during the day.²

6. Support them to have study-life balance

Your child should continue to maintain some balance during the assessment period. Encourage your child to engage in regular exercise, take time out to do things they enjoy and keep in touch with friends, all of which can help reduce their anxiety. If your child is struggling to find motivation, consider doing things with them – get them out of the house and go somewhere they enjoy, or go for a walk/run, or to a gym class together (or just drop them off!).

Regular exercise can improve your child's sleep and mood, increase their energy levels and fire up the 'feel-good' chemicals in their brain. They don't have to run a marathon – doing a small amount of physical activity every day can make a big impact.

7. Help your child to problem-solve

If you notice your child getting overwhelmed by their study, have a calm conversation with them about the problems they are facing. Help them think about solutions that might work for them and then help them create a plan.

Some ideas to find a solution:

- i. What study methods work best for them?
- ii. At what time of the day are they most alert?
- iii. Would it help to have a study session with a friend doing the same subject?
- iv. Can they space out their study rather than doing larger blocks?

If you think your child would benefit from some wellbeing tips for themselves, encourage them to check out this [fact sheet](#) for senior students.

8. Pay attention to your child's emotions

As parents/carers, you are well placed to recognise the signs of increased stress or worry in your child. While the right amount of stress can actually motivate them to get stuff done, it's important to be able to recognise when this stress has turned from being a motivating force to an overwhelming emotion. You may notice changes in behaviour, sleep, mood or eating habits – these are all normal expressions of stress, but by noticing and responding with care and support or seeking additional support if you think your child needs it, you will help your child feel better.

Explore with your child ways that they can reduce their stress. For example, mindfulness can help focus your child's thoughts and shift their attention from the pressures of 'doing' to the joy of 'being' in the moment. Find a mindfulness app or try some activities with them from the department's [wellbeing activities for students' booklet](#).

9. Be aware of your emotions

Exam periods can be as stressful for parents as they are for students! It is important to understand the effect your own behaviour can have on your child. If you are stressed, your child will take their cues from you. Take time out for yourself, even for ten minutes a day. Managing your own stress will make you much better equipped to help your child to stay positive, focus on their strengths and manage their stress.

10. Be there for your child

Although they might not always acknowledge it, the support you give your child during exam time is invaluable. Take opportunities to remind them that you are in their corner and are proud of them for how hard they are working.

11. Encourage help-seeking

If your child is struggling, encourage them to chat with trusted friends or other family, or to speak to their teachers. If you feel that your child needs extra support, get in touch with the school to find out how to contact the Guidance Officer or other support staff. Support is also available for young people through Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or by visiting the [Kids Helpline website](#).

Tip:

As part of your child's original study plan, encourage them to make a list of people who they can go to if they need support. Stress can impair their ability to think logically and make decisions, so having a list will make reaching out for support much easier for them.

1 Drake, Roehrs, Shambroom & Roth (2013). Caffeine effects on sleep taken 0, 3, or 6 hours before going to bed. *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, (9)11.

2 Ellenbogen JM, Payne JD, Stickgold R. The role of sleep in declarative memory consolidation: passive, permissive, active or none? *Curr Opin Neurobiol*. 2006 Dec;16(6):716-22. Epub 2006 Nov 7.