



GCSE Revision Guide What can a parent do?

A top-down photograph of a study desk. A white sheet of paper is pinned to a brown cardboard surface with two black clips. The paper has the text "TIPS TO ENSURE SUCCESS!" printed on it. Surrounding the paper are various stationery items: a black pen, a grey pen, a white pen, a pencil sharpener, a blue pen, a black paperclip, a pencil, and a white marker with a black cap. A black folder is visible in the top right corner.

TIPS TO ENSURE SUCCESS!

Introduction – The Most Common Frustrations for Parents

I didn't even do GCSEs; how can I help him...?

Surely, she shouldn't be going out again when she's got exams coming up...?

I don't understand all this coursework, levels and module exams – it's completely different from when I was at school...

He always leaves everything to the last minute – one moment he has all the time in the world – the next it's all stress and stropping because it has to be in tomorrow and he hasn't got the stuff he needs to do it...

I can't stand the arguments and stress when I tell him exams are important and try to make him work. It always ends up with him saying it's his life and slamming the door...

She's always panicked in exams. When I try and help her it always ends in a slanging match. I just seem to make her more stressed...

There're a million different websites to help but how do you know which are good...?

She's always got an excuse – I don't know what to believe...

How Can You Make a Difference?

Parental support is eight times more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a recent study. The Campaign for Learning found that parental involvement in a child's education can mean the difference between an 8 or 9 grade and an 'also-ran' at GCSE. (*TES*, 10 October 2003).

Your involvement during these crucial years can make an enormous difference – the difference between success and failure, or between 2 – 3 passes and 7, 8 & 9s.

The good news is – you don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects your child chooses to make a real difference! You don't have to give up your own life and responsibilities to help. You just need to know how best to spend the time you do have, at each stage of the process.

The next few pages of this booklet will enable you to do just that – providing you with clear and practical information you will need to help your child to meet the demands of their exam years, in partnership with us at Unity College. Ahead, we outline exactly what your child needs to be able to do to at each stage of the process to succeed and provide a number of practical ideas to apply throughout their two examination years.

Isn't it the job of Unity College to get my child through their exams?

Of the course the college has an important part to play and we will provide the expertise and resources to help your child acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to do their best in each subject.

There will be many new expectations of your child in their final years of school. Expectations which for many children, even the very brightest, are hard to meet. New demands on your child are likely to include:

- Being more self—motivated and taking more responsibility for their own learning
- Asking for help when they do not understand something
- Developing their abilities to overcome frustrations and strategies for persisting when they are learning material that they find challenging
- Organising themselves, notes, handouts and information from different subjects as well as the different topics within these
- Independently completing more work at home
- Understanding the exam structure and the relative important of each piece of work to their final grade
- Planning and executing their revision
- Perfecting their exam technique

Perhaps the hardest demand for GCSE students is that of understanding the long-term importance of doing the best they can and learning to shelve short-term fun at times in the interest of long-term benefits.

You are the expert on your own child and have always been their most important teacher. Your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of their examination years.

What is a Parent's Role?

Your role in helping your child to succeed will vary according to their needs and strengths. You will find that in the areas covered by some sections of this booklet, you have little to do, whilst others will require more support.

Your role may include some or all of the following:

- Making sure your child gets to college and lessons on time and understands the importance of making the most of their time in lesson
- Going to parents' evenings, asking questions and finding out how you can best support your child outside of school
- Providing the tools for homework and revision – a quiet space, a 'workbox' of stationery and other necessities
- Paying for the equipment, files and revision guides needed
- Showing an interest in the subject, helping with homework (without doing it for them!) and testing them when they ask you
- Acting as a Sounding Board & Adviser by helping your child to break tasks down so that they are more manageable, keeping an eye on progress and celebrating achievements
- Agreeing and arranging the rules for homework and revision, helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against recreational activities and revising the plans as necessary
- Getting copies of old exam papers, searching revision websites and finding out about the subject including exam structures and content

Whatever your child's individual needs, your primary role will always be that of a person who cares the most in the world – championing their needs and admiring their every achievement. The most important role you will play is that of a person who will love them and be proud of them whatever happens.

Good Exam Results – What is the Secret?

We tend to think of our children's results as being down to what happens on the day of the exam itself. Will they be in the right frame of mind? Will they be lucky and get the right questions? Will they remember what they have revised? When in fact, the results of exams are generally determined well before they sit the exam itself.

There are a number of stages in the process of achieving exam success and the secret of good exam results is about getting things right, whilst being aware of what can go wrong, at each stage of the process:

The broad stages are:

Stage 1: Learning the content first time round

The process of revision (literally 'looking at something again') does assume that the content of the subject has been learnt in the first place – **every lesson in school counts**.

Stage 2: Revision

Revision is the review and re-learning of work that you have already completed in class. Revising consistently will allow students to be able to recall certain facts (for example, formulae to work out area or volume in Maths or particular vocabulary in languages). In other cases, you will be expected to apply knowledge (for example, explaining the impact of the rise of the Nazi party for History).

Even the 'perfect' student, who has attended every lesson and paid attention throughout the exam years needs to revise to achieve their full potential. For the rest of us, the need for revision is even greater. Revision can be done in many ways, some of which are more effective than others. This booklet offers a way of planning revision as well as tips for using the most effective techniques.

Stage 3: The exam itself

Even with the first two stages successfully achieved, things can still go wrong. There are three sets of skills involved in taking exams: knowing the subject matter, organisational skills and 'exam technique'.

Supporting your child in setting themselves up for revision:

- Talk to your child about how you can support them and find out what they would find helpful
- The simplest things often get in the way of starting revision – weeks can be lost whilst students are 'going to get some stationery soon...' Get around this by simply providing whatever your child needs – folders, dividers, wallcharts etc.
- Encourage your child to empty their bag and file handouts and information from lessons at the end of each day. **They won't seem important until they need them**
- Support your child in choosing one good revision guide for each subject – it's the best investment you will make. There are lots around so check with the subject teacher yourself if you are not sure which is best
- Help your child to plan their revision timetable. It will take an investment of your time, but it is the one thing that will make the biggest difference to the effectiveness of their revision and therefore the outcome. Each child varies in the amount of support that they need at each stage of the revision process

Supporting your child in doing their revision:

- Support your child in sticking to their revision plan and keeping to the start and finishing times that they have agreed. Praise them when they do their work and if necessary, agree a reward structure. Don't make treats dependant on certain results as this will only add to their feelings of disappointment if they don't do as well as expected
- Top-up their 'workbox' with pens, rules, paper, notepads etc. Don't get wound up about lost items if you can help it. Motivation is hard enough to find and arguments will not help
- Provide their favourite snacks and water for revision periods
- Be flexible; if your child wants to go out on a revision night, agree before they leave when they will make up the time
- Be sensitive to the pressures that your child is feeling – let them know that if they are really not up to it on occasion, that it isn't the end of the world. Let it go when it really matters to them and remind them of all the good work they have done so far, and will continue to do. Remind them of the big picture, as this is what will count in the end
- Conduct regular 'check-ins' and don't 'nag' in between these agreed times. Show an interest in how the revision is going, talk through any difficulties and be prepared to help them reschedule their planning as necessary
- Keep things in perspective – your child may not be doing things the way you would do them, or as often as you would like, but they are doing the best they can in the way that works for them at the stage that they are at

How Much Revision?

It is important to not leave revision until the last minute. The earlier your child starts their revision for exams, the better. Many students underestimate the time needed for proper revision; this ultimately adds more stress and anxiety to the situation as they begin to overextend themselves to make up for the lack of time.

A simple way to work out the least amount of revision time needed:

For one GCSE subject, allow 1 hour of revision time per topic - '1 hour x total number of topics'

If a subject covers 50 topics, then that subject would require **at least** 50 hours of revision time. If your child is doing 8 subjects, each with 50 topics, they would require at least 400 hours of studying. If your child sets aside 3 hours every day for revision, they will need to start revising at least 5 months before their exams to cover all topics.

Do this exercise with your child to let them appreciate the number of hours it will take to revise their subjects, allowing them to understand why it will benefit them to begin their revision at the earliest possible time.

Planning GCSE Revision Time

It's fair to say that most teenagers are not known to be the most organised individuals however effective revision first begins with organisation. Therefore, as parents it is beneficial for your child if you can assist them with the planning of their revision time.

There is a huge belief that serious revision equates to studying for hours on end. Marathon studying sessions however are certainly not recommended. You should encourage 30 - 45 minutes revision sessions with short breaks in between. Optimally, students should study for no more than 4 hours per day as studying for long periods of time is counterproductive. The brain will become tired and students will experience difficulty in focussing meaning that increasingly, less and less information will be retained.

The fundamental principle to revising is to do it habitually and constantly in little bits at a time. A student who studies for 2 hours, 7 days a week will be much better prepared than a student who panic studies for 10 hours over 2 days.

Revision planning begins with creating a revision timetable (there is a template for this at the end of this booklet.) To be consistent, students should strive to study at least 5 days of the week. On weekdays, this time would be after school and the choice is theirs on weekends. Advise your child to breakdown their subjects by topics; so revising Maths on a Tuesday night becomes revising quadratic equations instead. Give priority to the subjects and topics that your child finds most difficult, placing them early in the timetable and allowing more revision time.

Sometimes, it is good to plan a night off. This could be every other week, or whatever works best for you and your child. These nights off are a great opportunity for your child to have fun and relax. Perhaps watch a movie together or have a friend over. Allow them the opportunity to be stress-free in this stressful GCSE period.

I've Left it Too Late to Revise...

One of the **biggest mistakes** that students make is not allowing enough time for revision. This usually results, when they do realise just how much is involved, in demotivation and an attitude that there is 'no point' in undergoing any revision as the task is too big.

The **key point** to remember is that it is never too late until your child enters the exam room – with revision, a little knowledge is better than none at all, and could make the difference between an overall pass or fail.

Put in place a damage limitation plan. Help your child to make the best use of the time that they have got left, however little, by assisting them to prioritise and structure their revision tasks into more manageable chunks.

Rather than hurriedly reading through the whole GCSE syllabus, identify and agree on a few key areas and encourage them to revise these as thoroughly as possible.

Keep up motivation and self-esteem by reminding your child of how they have coped with difficult situations in the past and that the exam period will soon be over. Talk about the strengths and qualities that they have that will contribute to the best outcome in the circumstances.

Dealing with Stress

A degree of stress is normal and is actually necessary for successfully tackling exams. Some of the symptoms of stress can include:

- Difficulty getting to sleep or waking up
- Tiredness
- Poor appetite
- Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
- Headaches and other unexplained aches and pains
- Irritability and frequent angry episodes

You know your child best and so any marked changes in behaviour are worth checking out.

If your child is stressed, try to encourage them to take time away from their work and instead do something that they enjoy. Exercise promotes hormones that actively counter stress so try to encourage this. Ensure your child eats well and let them know that you are always there to listen.

Try not to offer immediate solutions to worries or to give advice unless it is asked for. Stressed people often need somebody to listen and empathise with the feelings that they are expressing. Strategies that may help to regain a sense of perspective include:

- Reminding your child what percentage of the final results the piece of work represents
- Reminding them of when they have overcome difficulties in the past
- Getting them to focus on what they have achieved despite this blip
- Pointing out that little is achieved without hard work and mistakes being made – it's part of life and learning and adults frequently make mistakes too

Adverse Circumstances

If your child misses an exam or doesn't perform as well as they could have done because of illness, bereavement or other serious adverse circumstances, or if they are unable to complete coursework for similar reasons the most important thing to do is to let college know immediately. Most Examination Boards will give special consideration in these circumstances and staff at college will be able to let you know the relevant procedures to follow.

Revision Techniques

Revision is an **active** process. This means that students have to do something with the notes that they are working with. Some ideas that your child could use are:

Mind Maps & Knowledge Organisers

This is a way of linking ideas together using single words or phrases. Use colour to try and arrange a topic into themes for a successful mind map. Knowledge Organisers give students the key knowledge that they need for each topic.

Revision Cards

These are useful for topic-based revision. Students will need to write the key word or topic on one side and then fill in details about topics on the back. This will give your child a set of revision notes that they can refer to.

Exam Questions & Feedback

Past exam papers are a great way to revise. Your child will need to work with their teacher to ensure they are using appropriate papers and respond to any feedback they are given.

Revision Tasks Set in School

Teachers will set suitable tasks to complete and also provide feedback to help your child improve. Completing these on time is essential to allow teachers time to plan to support you.

Remember...

When you, your child **and** the college work in partnership, you can be sure that your child will achieve the best results possible.

Further Support:

- www.gcseguide.co.uk – use the 'bookshop' option to see what revision guides are available in each subject area
- www.gcse.com is a fantastic platform for revision techniques
- More information can be found at each individual exam board website:
www.aqa.org.uk
www.edexcel.org.uk
www.ocr.org.uk
www.wjec.co.uk

GOOD LUCK!

