



Inspir^{ED}



Parent Guide

PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR
SENIOR STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that Year 12 will be one of the most difficult periods of your child's schooling life. Not only is this a stressful time for our sons and daughters, but parents also tend to ride a roller coaster of emotions during this time.

While we can't sit their tasks/exams for them, there are things that we can do to reduce their pressures and help them achieve their best.

The good news is that as a parent - you matter! All of the research and our experience into student performance points to the fact that parents play a critical role and impact in your child's results (no matter your own level of education).

This guide will outline some research and strategies on how you can provide emotional support to your child. It will also include practical suggestions that have been tested and endorsed by psychologists, counsellors, teachers and parents alike.

WHO WE ARE

For students preparing for their final years of school, InspirED delivers high quality and engaging face-to-face and online education services led by senior teachers, markers and assessors in partnership with leading universities.

As well as helping students increase their results, InspirED is committed to supporting students to reach their full potential through the development of well-rounded skills for success in study and life.

Over the last 15 years, we've helped over 30,000 students from over 400 schools achieve their potential.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

With students riding a rollercoaster of emotions throughout their senior years, providing emotional support to our children is often tricky, although vital. Numerous studies have demonstrated that what happens within a family, specifically the amount of connectedness between family members, has a positive correlation to their results.

We know that family and friends in particular play a vital role in protecting student's mental health, especially during really stressful times. Studies have shown that most students in Year 12 will experience a high level of stress, frequently without any obvious indicators.

Many also fear that they might let their family down. Others fear that they will not be able to match the performance of siblings or relatives. Some moderate levels of stress can be useful to maintain motivation, but if your son/daughter starts to find their stress levels rising too high, this will negatively affect both their academic achievement and, more importantly, their mental health.

Many of these tips address the emotional and social elements of relationships, which in turn allow for opportunities for success.

Let's explore seven strategies that can be implemented with your teen:





SEVEN STRATEGIES

1. Help them maintain perspective

Perhaps one of the biggest contributors to stress during the HSC is when students are told that their futures rely so heavily on the outcomes. It is absolutely critical that you and your student keep a healthy and realistic perspective.

To your teenager, it can seem like the entire future is riding on their final year. It's important that you help them keep a realistic, moderate perspective.

As a parent, you can help take the pressure off. Avoid making 'all-or-nothing' statements or focusing too heavily on the outcome of the results. Emphasise a school-life balance during years 11 and 12, so that your student isn't devoting 100% of the energies to obsessing over their performance.

All a student can do is his or her best. Preparation and effort are the tools on the path to success, but they are also the success themselves. Ultimately, Year 12 is just a test. It is not a determination of their value or even of the full range of their skills. Tests can be stressful, and not every student best displays their abilities in the exam room.

Success in Year 12 requires a number of factors to be in balance. Your child's self-expectations must be in balance with their abilities. Unrealistic expectations set the young person up for failure and stress. It is also very important for parent's expectations to be realistic regarding their child's abilities.

A note on future career aspirations:

By Year 12, many students don't have a clue about what they want to do beyond school. This can lead to them being unfocused, and less motivated to study.

Most schools offer career counselling which profiles your child's interests and strengths to suggest career pathways. Armed with some idea of where they're headed, it can be much easier for them to make smart choices.

2. Stay connected

During times of stress and anxiety, it's vital that students feel as though they you, as parents, 'have their back'!

The most important thing throughout this time is to stay connected and talk to your teenager about how they're feeling, and encourage positive, helpful thinking patterns. Communication is the key to this.

Use their cues to guide the conversation and keep it light rather than interrogatory. If they're feeling like tasks are huge and overwhelming, it can help to talk with them about how to break these into smaller, more manageable chunks.

3. Be patient

As parents, it's really important that remaining understanding and patient, particularly around assessment and exam times, is an excellent strategy. Tempers may fray easily, for both teens and parents, so keep in mind that it's the "anxiety talking" rather than any other reasons,

Try modelling calmness, not overreacting to their stress or anger and reassuring them that their final marks do not define them.

4. Encourage them to stay active

In times of business and stress, it's more important than ever to stay healthy. One of the key ways your child can prioritise wellness is through physical activity. Exercise is an integral part of overall health, and it can also serve as a major stress reducer. Encourage your teen to engage in regular movement, whether that's with a sports team, a dance classes, or simply by going for evening jogs or walks.

Your teen might not feel that they can take time away from their studies to exercise, but they should make it a habit. Remind them that even 20-30 minutes a day can do wonders for their stress. If your teen understands the mental benefits of exercise, they may appreciate its usefulness even more.





5. Encourage routines and organisation

It's very helpful to have routines that support good health and wellbeing during the exam period. This can include having regular mealtimes, healthy snacks and meals, and encouraging times for physical activity and exercise to help 'burn off' the stress hormone cortisol.

Similarly, research suggests that the better organised your son/daughter is, the higher their chances of success. Being overwhelmed with assignments is worsened when your student has a chaotic schedule or a cluttered desk. Before the school term even begins, set up your teen with all the essential tools to make their life easier.

Get them a quality desk in a quiet area of your home. Go on a shopping trip and get them a fully equipped supply cache. Provide them with organisational tools such as folders, binders, and index cards. Having all of these things on hand makes this process seem less daunting and more within reach.

During this demanding time in your teen's life, don't hesitate to offer them extra support, either. Let them know that their needs are extremely important.

6. Celebrate every success!

Year 12 is a journey. To make it more enjoyable and conquerable, be sure to celebrate your teen's every success. After all, it isn't just about the final exams, but about the work that is completed along the way. Congratulate them on a well-written essay or let them know that you've noticed they're doing a really great job of managing their time. Be proud of them for a unique project they have tackled or just for all the hard work they're putting in. High school is your teen's full-time job and it can be a tough one.

Your celebrations don't need to be huge, but it's meaningful if you do something to mark each occasion. It's also a great excuse to take some time away from books and studying for some fun. These are the times that they will remember most fondly!

7. Offer whatever support & assistance they need

The best way to help your student during their final years is to simply be there for them.

Sometimes this might mean listening to them complain about their workload or letting them vent about a particularly tough assignment. At such times, they just want to get their tension out and likely aren't looking for advice.

But there are other ways to support your child and these are going to be different for each individual student. Not sure what they need? Just ask!

Let your teen know that you're available to help them out with whatever task, no matter how small. Sometimes, your teen may need something as simple as a new set of pens or a pack of paperclips. Or perhaps they need you to look over one of their assignments and provide a bit of feedback from a fresh set of eyes, or organising additional help from other parties.

Be there for what they require, and they'll be very grateful.



SUMMARY

Almost all students at some stage will require emotional support. While these strategies are 'best practice' for parents, please don't hesitate to seek further help from others, particularly if there are ongoing issues or you feel as though additional help is required.

There are a great deal of professional services that can also be accessed; both within schools and with other health professionals. Some good examples include:

- [headspace](#)
- [ReachOut.com](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#)
- [Youth Beyond Blue](#)
- [Black Dog Institute](#)
- [your local GP](#)

Further reading:

- *ReachOut 2019: Exam Stress*, available at <https://au.reachout.com/everyday-issues/exam-stress>
- *Beyond Blue 2019: Age 13+*, available at <http://bit.ly/BeyondBlueHelp>
- *Diana Haskins 2001: Parent as Coach*, White Oak Publishing, Redwood City.



CHECKLIST



We've made a quick checklist for you to summarise the key strategies for providing emotional support, and to provide a reference point for you to check your progress.

Maintaining perspective:

- Am I encouraging my child to keep a realistic perspective of what Year 12 entails?
- Do I avoid 'all-or-nothing' statements regarding the meaning of year 12?
- Have I promoted a healthy school-life balance?

Staying connected:

- Does my child feel like I have their back?
- Am I communicating with them regularly, and letting them guide the conversation?
- Have I helped my child break their pressures into small, achievable steps?

Being patient:

- Am I being mindful of the pressures and anxieties that manifest in year 12?
- Have I made note of when my child's most intense assessment periods are?
- Do I model mindfulness and calmness through my own actions?

Encouraging activeness:

- Does my child participate in a sport or exercise on at least a weekly basis?
- Have I communicated to them the benefits of exercising for the mind?
- Do I make sure to facilitate their sporting activities around the family schedule?

Encouraging organisation:

- Have I provided my child with a quiet space and the tools to study effectively?
- Do I prepare healthy meals at a regular time each evening?
- Am I supportive of my child's timetabling around their varying commitments?

Celebrating successes:

- Am I recognising my child's big wins in a special and considerate way?
- Do I keep track of how they're performing in their assessments/commitments?
- Do they know that I'm proud of their achievements?

Offering support:

- Do I allow my child to vent about their frustrations, and support them through it?
- Do I support them academically, or is there someone they can go to?
- Do I communicate with them regularly so that they know I'm here for them?