



Exam Anxiety-Staff Guidance

The majority of students suffer with exam anxiety to some degree. With the introduction of linear exams, anxiety levels are increasing. Add to that the pressure on School/College Staff to achieve good results and it is no surprise that the exam season is a highly stressful period! Some students find this level of stress difficult to cope with, and it is proven to affect their performance in Exams (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-23958164>).

As staff, we have a vital role in helping students manage stress and anxiety. Our demeanour and language all play an important part in helping the students perform to the best of their ability. Research shows that positive encouragement always achieves better results than negative encouragement. Unfortunately, negative language can become entrenched in our approach. We feel we have to scare students into believing they could fail in order to 'motivate' them to pass.

What would make you feel more motivated? Being told you're valued, pointing out your talents and setting challenges to work on. Or being told you are the worst teacher in the whole school and if you don't improve you'll let the whole school down????

Negative thoughts lead to negative feelings which in turn lead to negative behaviour. The negative behaviour can lead to consequences that reinforce the initial negative thought. Continued

negative thought processes reinforce anxiety/stress and can become debilitating. Common student thoughts about exams are:

- ☹ 'Everyone will be so disappointed in me because I won't get the grades.'
- ☹ 'I am going to let the teachers and everybody down because I am useless.'
- ☹ 'I will fail all my exams and I will end up homeless and jobless.'
- ☹ 'I can never take them again so this is my only chance.'

How can you help?

DO NOT:

- ☹ Tell students the rest of their lives depend on these exams.
- ☹ Tell students they cannot retake these exams.
- ☹ Believe that a student will only perform if you give them a shock e.g. you know you are going to fail the exams.
- ☹ Tell a student they are going to fail.
- ☹ Tell them they will be the only failure in the class.
- ☹ Joke there are always vacancies for Big Issue Sellers/Macdonald's Workers.

DO:

- ☹ Use positive language statements.
- ☹ Discuss positive strategies for worst case scenarios, e.g. you can retake in 6th Form or look at alternative courses.
- ☹ Do provide a range of study/revision techniques, don't presume all students will successfully use the one that worked for you.
- ☹ Tell them to try their best.
- ☹ Remind them there are always options whatever their results.

Good luck!