JANUARY 2021 UPDATE

Includes:

Making the most of the day

Protecting your child's mental health

All the basics for success

THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO

STUDYING FOR A LEVELs

IN 2020/2021

The Parents' Guide to provides parents with the information they need to help their teenage children make the right choices to create successful futures after A level and sixth form.

Our online guides are designed to inform, involve and guide parental support. They include the most up to date information on topics such as apprenticeships, universities and revision techniques.

Wherever we refer to 'parents' we mean 'parents and carers.' This includes grand-parents, older siblings or any other person with significant caring responsibilities for children.

This guide has been produced to support parents and schools during the coronavirus outbreak. We give practical advice; however we are not medical professionals and you should seek expert advice if needed. We make recommendations of what we believe to be reliable sources to help you find further information but these organisations have not endorsed this guide.

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Find out what's new

If you're interested in regular updates about how you can help your teenage children, ***click here*** or visit ***www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/join-us***

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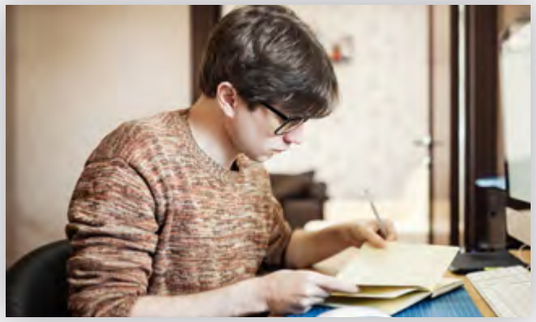

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Introduction

We've created this update to The Parents' Guide to Study and Exam Revision at A level 2020/2021, to provide you with some specific support now there are further school closures and exam cancellations this year. If you're wondering how to help keep your teen focused on studying for their A levels without the pressure of the end of course exams and how you will cope with schooling from home, we've got plenty of ideas for you.

On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minster announced England would move to Tier 5 alert status and schools would close, re-opening at the earliest after February half term. It is possible schools will remain closed longer if the spread of Covid-19 remains high. Similar measures were announced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The current Year 13 has already experienced school closures in the first year of their A level course during the March 2020 lockdown. They have missed so much face-to-face teaching it is considered unfair that their grades should rely entirely on end of course examinations. What will happen instead?

At the moment, an alternative to examinations is under discussion with Ofqual and we'll update you as soon as decisions have been made. However, there are some likely possibilities:

- Teacher assessment will play a key role, as it did during cancelled examinations in summer 2020. This means ongoing assessment will be a consideration in the grades awarded. The work your teen is doing now will impact the grades they achieve. Attending online classes, participation in lessons and quality of homework will all contribute.
- Exams may not be cancelled completely, so your teen shouldn't think there will be no exams at all. The current system allows for 100% of the grade to be awarded based on performance in exams. It is possible that some examinations might take place (such as for smaller parts of the syllabus) and account for a percentage of the grade based on how much of the syllabus they cover.

Our aim is to give you the best chance of helping your child maximize their potential. We'll provide advice on why staying on top of school-work is so important for them and how you can help them do this; why routine it critical to success; how to help them balance their time between work and play; how to help them break down their work as if they were at school and why looking to their future ambitions will help keep them on track.

These are challenging times, but together we can rise to the challenge!

1: Starting with the basics

Attendance

Participating in online lessons is as important as attending lessons in school. Students should approach their online lessons with the same consideration they would show in class. Help them minimize distractions, such as turning the television and any background music off, setting their mobile phones to silent and, where possible, help them find a quiet place to sit without other members of the family coming and going.

Be present

Just as if they were at school, students should attend the lesson in full, not arriving late, leaving early or wandering off when the lesson is taking place. This does require more discipline at home than in the classroom, but it is achievable. Being present, by which we mean paying attention rather than just logging in then focusing elsewhere, will help them keep up with work. Students should also actively take part in lessons, such as asking and responding to questions, to demonstrate that they are actively engaging with what is being taught. This could also improve their experience of online lessons.

Lesson types

Not all online lessons involve interface with a teacher. In some cases, students may be set a task to complete, such as downloading and reading a document, doing some research or following online instructions. Ideally, even if the lesson isn't "live", students should do the work required for that lesson during the usual time the lesson takes place. This will help them keep to a timetable and use their time wisely (more on that later). However, in the event of device sharing, it may make sense for them to complete scheduled tasks at another time if someone else needs the device at that moment. Help them be flexible.

Computer sharing

Not all families have access to a device each. If this is the case, help create a family timetable allocating the device where it is most needed. Give priority to "live" lessons, then spread sharing with an appropriate balance of time so that all family members have access to enable them to complete tasks they can only do online. Pop the timetable somewhere prominent, such as on the fridge door, so everybody knows who has access when.

Register non-attendance

In the event that there's an unavoidable conflict and your child cannot attend a live online lesson because they have no access to a device, do get in touch with the school and explain the situation. Likewise, this also applies if your child is sick. Even though they are not physically at school, teachers still need to know whether there is a valid reason a pupil has missed a class – and they care about the wellbeing of their students! It also gives them an opportunity to provide their pupils with alternative ways of covering the work.

In short:

- ✓ Your child should attend all online lessons as if they were face to face classes
- ✓ Help them to remove distractions
- ✓ Encourage them to participate to show active engagement
- ✓ Don't forget - not all online lessons involve teacher interaction
- ✓ Let teachers know when and why your child cannot attend an online class

ACTIVELY ENGAGING IN ONLINE LESSONS WILL IMPROVE THEIR EXPERIENCE OF REMOTE LEARNING

Homework

Traditionally we think of "homework" as tasks set for completion outside of teaching time, either at home or during "study periods". With school closures, your child may receive more of this type of work. This doesn't mean they have extra homework, just that there may be fewer lessons that involve live teaching and so they may be assigned work to complete independently. Homework helps consolidate learning (helping to understand and remember things that have already been taught) and to provide the groundwork to learn new things. Your child should attempt all assigned tasks to the best standard they can achieve within the recommended timeframe.

Time matters

Regularly spending too little or too long on single pieces of work isn't helpful in the long term. For example, if a piece of work is set for completion during a 30-minute lesson period, spending just 10 minutes on it indicates they probably haven't done enough, but if they spend an hour (and multiply this up by however many tasks they are set each day) they will be over-burdening themselves, which is unhealthy. You don't need to monitor exactly how much time they spend on each project but do keep an eye on whether they seem short of things to do on a regular basis or if they are working too long, too often.

Presentation counts

If they are submitting work to be marked, either written by hand or typed, it should be neatly presented on appropriate paper (or sent via the right digital format). Presentation can be an indicator of how much effort has been put into a piece of work.

Handwriting

Most examinations are completed by hand. Although there may be no examinations this year, your child may well need to take examinations in the future. They don't want to lose their handwriting skills by submitting everything online. If it's possible, they should produce some homework by hand. If that's not possible, help them keep up their writing skills by preparing lists, notes and letters at home.

Research

Research usually forms a large part of learning. Finding out things for yourself is a great way of remembering them. If your child has been assigned a research project, they should be able to demonstrate that they have undertaken some research by showing where they researched, how they went about finding out more and possibly include notes on any text they've read.

Understanding

If your teen is struggling to understand something, they should use additional resources such as text books or online sources to find out more. If this doesn't help, they are not alone! They can work (online) with other students and share their learning together. If they still don't understand, they can contact their teacher by email (or during a lesson) to help with an explanation. Don't forget, to comply with safeguarding, many schools do not permit teachers to contact students by phone or video conference on a one-to-one basis.

Chunking

In the same way that short bursts of study are more effective than long sessions, breaking down work into smaller chunks makes it more manageable. For example, reading a book might feel over-whelming. Reading one chapter each day seems manageable, gives a sense of achievement on each completion, and means the overall target will be completed within a reasonable time. Every journey begins with the first step!

Tests

It's inevitable that students will need to take tests and they should take them seriously by preparing ahead. That said, a test is a comparatively small part of their overall performance, so don't let them worry that performing poorly in a test will have a significant impact on their overall A level grade now that formal exams have been cancelled.

Independent Learning

At sixth form, teachers are beginning to coach students in independent learning – researching and learning things for yourself, without input or guidance from others. Some of the assignments they will be given will involve independent learning, but in many cases, they will have been given details on what they should research, where they should look and what they might expect to find. Although they are missing out on face-to-face teacher time, they are not being left to their own devices without direction.

For more information on supporting your teen with revision, see The Parents' Guide to A level Study and Exam Revision pages 30-43

Further reading

The Parents' Guide to Study and Exam Revision

The Parents' Guide to revision tips

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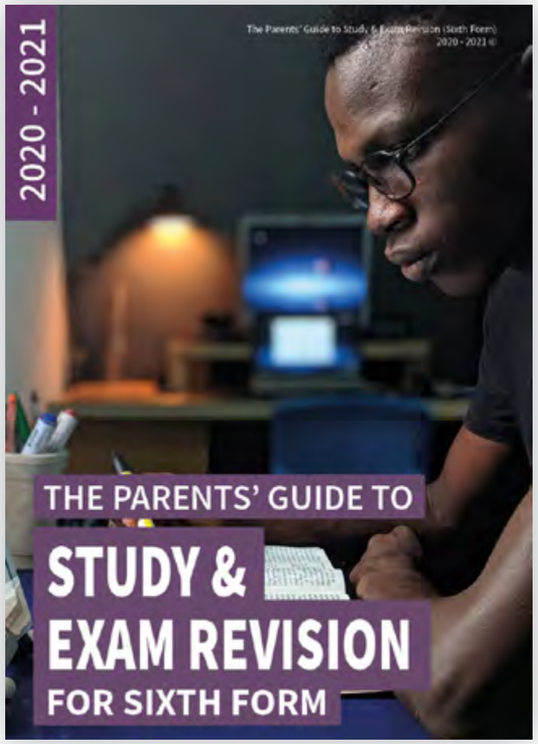
In short:

- ✓ Your child should attempt to complete all their homework
- ✓ They should do their best with every assignment
- ✓ They shouldn't spend too little or too much more time on each assignment outside what is recommended
- ✓ Work submitted should be neatly presented
- ✓ Help them keep up handwriting skills where possible
- ✓ They should be able to show what and how they have carried out research
- ✓ They can seek additional help from other online sources, their peers or by emailing their teacher
- ✓ They should prepare for tests but keep perspective that not doing well is not the end of the world – nor does it mean they will fail their A level
- ✓ They should break down larger projects into smaller chunks to make the work more manageable.

HELP THEM KEEP UP HANDWRITING SKILLS WHERE POSSIBLE

You may also be interested in

Click me to sample some pages



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2: Making the most of the day

Spending all day at home, with little opportunity to go out other than exercise and essential shopping, can create a loss of structure. There's also a risk that, without the day punctuated with specific things to do, one hour stretches into another and work expands to fit the time available. Help your child keep up healthy lifestyle habits by creating regular routines with as much variety as possible.

Try to be mindful that lockdown's difficult for all of us, but especially so for late teens. Just as they are approaching (or have already reached) official adulthood at 18 years old, when they should be establishing their independence and enjoying time with friends, this has been completely curtailed. There are no opportunities to go out – whether that's to bars, restaurants, clubs, concerts or even friends' houses. They are almost permanently confined to staying at home. They may feel resentful, so it's worth bearing this in mind if they resist organizing their time because "they can't do anything anyway". Listening and showing understanding plays a big part in reducing frustration, even when the situation itself hasn't changed.

Routine

As far as you can, maintain as much regularity as they would normally experience on a school day. Have set times for getting up, set times for school work, regular breaks, consistent meal times and times for relaxing. Most importantly, observe bedtimes as getting enough sleep is a primary contributor to good mental and physical health.

Starting well

Teenagers need a lot of sleep, so do let them enjoy an extra hour in bed when they don't have to travel to school. However, they should be up, washed, dressed and have eaten breakfast in time for a prompt start to their regular school day. If they don't have an online lesson first thing, they should make a start on their school work.

Family time

It's great to have some screen-free family time every day. Dinner is an ideal time for this. Get your teens involved by having them actively take responsibility for some part of the dining experience – whether it's cooking, clearing up, laying the table or deciding on menus. Having regular family time also creates space for allowing private time throughout the day. We're not used to being together all day, every day so give some breathing space at home.

For more information on supporting your teen with revision, see The Parents' Guide to A level Study and Exam Revision pages 6-29

Breaks

Until September last year, in most cases pupils moved between lessons and teachers stayed in the same classrooms. This enable students to take a mini-break between classes, get up and be active as well as have a chance to chat. There's also a formal break mid-morning and at lunchtime. Check your child's timetable and make sure they have factored in breaks, including one at the end of the school day when they would usually be travelling home. It's a good idea for them to stand up and walk about the house for a minute or two between each lesson when a formal break isn't timetabled.

At A level level, they will still probably need to do two to three hours additional work after the school day, but they should have wind down time in the evening, including half-an-hour device free time before bed.

In short:

- ✓ Create a regular routine for your family and stick to it
- ✓ A level students should so some school work after the formal school day to keep up with their studies, but they shouldn't work all evening
- ✓ Get your child set up for the day by being washed, dressed and having eaten breakfast ahead of school time
- ✓ Help them create a daily timetable, including school time, study, breaks and rest
- ✓ Get them up and moving during breaks – not just switching between online work and online social
- ✓ Enjoy some family time, but allow personal time too

Useful links

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The Parents' Guide to: Support articles

Revision Timetables

Timetables

Encourage your teen to create their own Mon-Fri timetable – include work and play time – and get them to stick to it. It might look something like this, including a five minute break between each lesson:

Time	Activity
7.30am	Wake up - shower, breakfast, dress
8.45am	Registration
9.00am	Lesson 1 / study
9.45am	Lesson 2 / study
10.15am	Break - walk, stretch, get a snack
10.30am	Lesson 3 / study
11.15am	Lesson 4 / study
12.00pm	Lesson 5 / study
12.45pm	Lunch - walk, stretch, prepare and eat food
1.45pm	Lesson 6 / study
2.15pm	Lesson 7 / study
3.00pm	Free time - exercise, go outdoors
4.45pm	Study - 20/30 minute chunks with breaks
5.45pm	Help prepare dinner / eat dinner / free-time
7.00pm	Study - 20/30 minute chunks with breaks
8.45pm	Free time
10.00pm	Free time (without devices / technology)
10.45pm	Prepare for bed / sleep

3: Creating a positive mindset

It's remarkable how our behaviours influence our mindset. Help your child set good intentions by encouraging them to clean their teeth, shower, dress and eat before the day begins. Rolling out of bed and going online isn't a good way to start the day.

Being active

Give them opportunities to move about to burn off excess energy. They should walk away from their study areas between lessons and during break times to give their eyes a rest from the screen and get their circulation moving. They should get some exercise outside each day. If they're couch potatoes, give them something specific to achieve and praise them when they've done it.

Time together and time alone

Make time for family moments and shared experiences (such as meal times or doing something together), but allow them time alone too. Don't keep checking on whether or not they're studying or walking into their room (and they shouldn't walk into yours!). Personal space is important too, especially when we're confined to limited spaces.

Dress

Whether or not they wear uniform at sixth form, they should get dressed during the day rather than stay in pyjamas or lounge wear. Both of these clothes are designed for relaxing and will not put your teen in the right mindset for work and study. A great idea is for them to wear something smarter during the day (even if that's just jeans and a jumper) then change at the end of the day into their favourite casual clothes to help distinguish between time for work and time to relax.

Keep the end game in sight

A great way to endure short term pain is to think of long term gain. Talk to your child about their long term goals. Why are their A level grades important to them? Do they want to go on to university, take an apprenticeship, have they a job in mind. Remembering the goals and dreams they are striving to achieve makes it easier to knuckle down in the short term.

In short:

- ✓ Actions impact thoughts and mindset, so encourage them to act positively
- ✓ Arrange family time, but allow them alone time too
- ✓ Get them to dress in the morning – no lounging all day in jim-jams!
- ✓ Look to the future – in the long term, why is getting good A level results important to them?

Senses

We all need stimulation to help maintain interest. This is harder when we're restricted to staying at home most of the time. Help your child keep alert by using all their senses.

Tap into their sense of **smell**. We all know lavender is soothing, but zesty citrus helps enliven us, cinnamon is comforting and rosemary helps clear the mind and sooth headaches. You don't need to risk burning candles in your teen's room if that doesn't feel safe, a few drops of essential oil on a tissue slipped up their sleeve or under their pillowworks just as well.

Sound impacts our mood. Whilst we encourage turning off music if they are attending online lessons, listening to music while studying helps some teens concentrate, so allow them to make their own choices. That said, listening to uplifting music during the day, and soothing music in the evening will help tie into their natural circadian rhythms.

Colour can also have an impact on mood. Red is energizing, aids concentration and helps focus on detailed tasks. Get your child to wear red or have red accessories on their desk; however, if they are filled with energy, this can over-stimulate them, so calming blue might be preferable. Green is an excellent choice – it's lively yet calming and yellow can get people talking.

Having different textures around can appeal to their sense of **touch**. Soothing silks, feathers and velvets calm, whilst cool, smooth surfaces with jaunty edges perk us up (think of an angular mug).

Sucking peppermint (sugar free!) can aid concentration, sparkling water or juices can literally make us feel bubbly, and vanilla and chocolate can relieve anxiety and make us feel safe and cosy. Introduce international foods to the family menu and experience a **taste** tantalising round-the-world trip without leaving your home.

4: Finding a balance

Much teenage leisure time involves being online. As a parent, that's sometimes difficult to understand, as we didn't have any of the online diversions available today – no social media, no YouTube, no online games or TV channels and no Tik Tok. However, your teen might struggle to differentiate between work and play, particularly with lessons being online. Help them spot the difference.

Focus

When they are doing school work they should be doing school work and when they are having fun they should be having fun. That's easier said than done. Our web browsers are designed to distract us and hold our attention. If your child has a research project and they start moving around the web, they may find some ads irresistible, click through and unintentionally find themselves for the next few minutes (hours!) completely distracted from school work.

The answer to this is self-discipline. If they find themselves distracted during work time, they need to go back to their school work. If they don't, it could seem as if they've been working on a school project for hours, when in fact the project has merely been open and, consequently, it feels like they've been working on it for hours. Help them have clear distinction between study time and play time.

Minimize other distractions by turning mobile phones to silent when they should be studying. At this age, they should take responsibility themselves for sensible phone use, but a little encouragement from you might help them stay on track.

Procrastination

It's far too easy to put off doing something we don't fancy doing, especially when we think we have lots of time in the day to do it later. That's why a timetable is so important. Get work done early in the day and look forward to free time later.

Short bursts

It's much more effective to study in short bursts. Regular breaks will also help your child feel motivated (not too long to move on to something else) and energized, particularly if they move about between work sessions.

Useful links

Click me! I'm interactive.

How to talk to your child about their future

Helping your child 'stand out'

Downtime

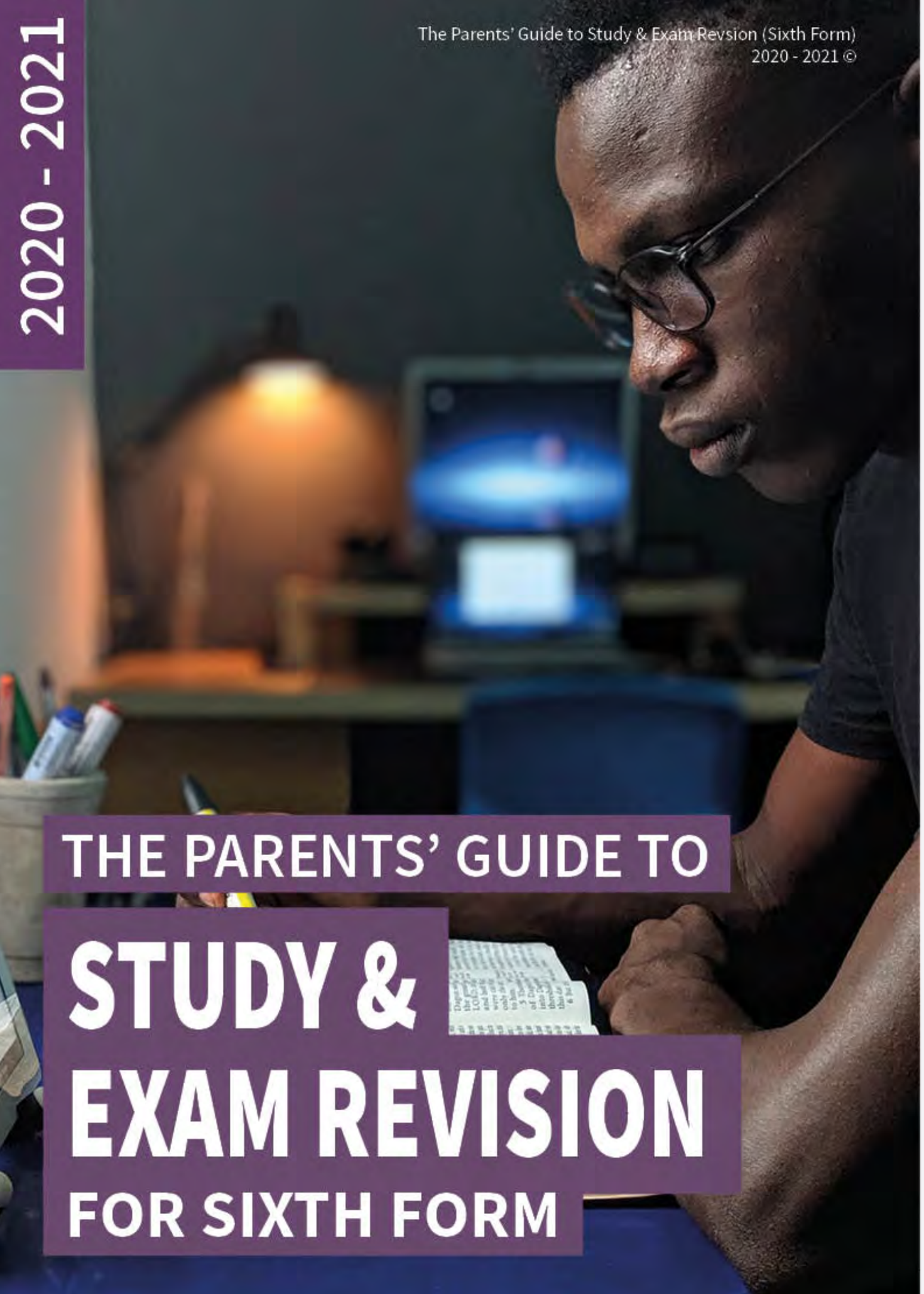
A timetable with clear separation between work and play is more effective than creating a list of tasks to do in a day and only having downtime once they're all done. Teenagers are more likely to focus on the task in hand, even if they're not keen on doing it, when they know there's a defined end time. In addition, it's important for them to enjoy leisure time without feeling guilty that they should be doing something else.

Non-screen time

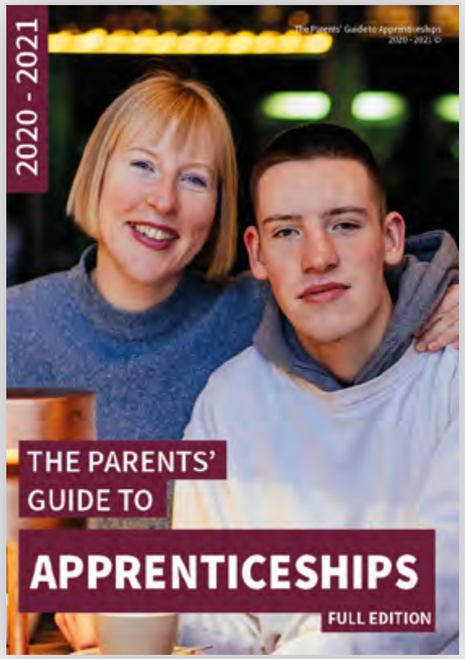
Teenagers love being online and we encourage you to allow them to enjoy some leisure time online as well as some study time. However, it is vital for good health that your child spends some time away from the screen each day. At any time, but especially during lockdown, insist your child takes their daily outdoor exercise allowance to burn off some energy, get moving and rest their eyes from the screen.

In short:

- ✓ Set a timetable for work and play and stick to it.
- ✓ Allow your teen to spend some of their relaxing time online – but not all of it!
- ✓ Encourage them not to get distracted by clickbait when they are working on school projects.
- ✓ Turn devices they are not using to silent to avoid interruptions.
- ✓ Remind them not to procrastinate and waste time browsing the web/social media/ games when they should be getting on with school work.
- ✓ Study in short bursts.
- ✓ Allow them defined relaxation times and don't talk to them about work during these.
- ✓ Ensure they spend some time off screen every day.



You may also be interested in:



5: Protecting mental health

Staying resilient and managing stress is very important to health and wellbeing and there are proven techniques you can teach your child to use to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. It's perfectly natural for your child to be worried, especially with all the lifestyle changes and uncertainty that coronavirus has caused – you are probably worried too!

In small doses, anxiety can be a good thing: helping your child to focus, get motivated and even recall facts they were unaware they'd learnt.

Prolonged periods or bouts of intense anxiety have a negative impact, but there are lots of ways you can help them manage this anxiety and use routines to help them keep calm. If you haven't introduced them to some of these techniques already, we've included some suggestions on our website. It will put them on positive footing for lifelong healthy habits.

In some cases there can be times when anxiety reaches exceptional levels and professional support is required. We've provided some guidance on how you can tell the difference and where you can reach out.

EXPERIENCING SOME ANXIETY IS NORMAL BUT NOT IF YOUR CHILD IS ANXIOUS ALL THE TIME

Signs of anxiety and stress

It's good to be aware of the signs of anxiety and stress so you can watch out for them. A change in behaviour for a day or two might be nothing to worry about, but if you notice a regular change, then it's usually a sign that something is wrong. Some of the more common signs of anxiety include:

- Losing interest in things they've previously enjoyed;
- Behaving in the opposite way to usual – quiet children can become very chatty, chatty children can get withdrawn;
- Being grumpy and irritable;
- Lots of headaches and digestive problems (stomach aches, diarrhoea, constipation, vomiting etc);
- Worrying all the time, this can show itself in only picturing negative outcomes (what if I fail, I'm going to fail, I can't do this);
- Talking over and over the same concern and being unable to either stop thinking about it or to find relief;
- Physical symptoms (sweaty palms, shaking, fast heartbeat, aching muscles);
- Restlessness and being unable to stay still;
- Inability to concentrate (such as taking in what's happening in a TV programme);
- Panic attacks;
- Not sleeping.

Remember to keep perspective. If they have had several late nights, they are likely to be tired and this increases irritability. If they've been exercising, they might have aching muscles. If they've just run to meet you, they'll have a fast heart rate. Individual or a short-term combination of the above symptoms are normal.

For more information on supporting your teen to protect and increase their mental resilience, see The Parents' Guide to A level Study and Exam Revison pages 56-61

Useful links

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The Parents' Guide to: Reframing 2020

NHS Support with anxiety

Where to get support

Professional support

Professional support includes more than counsellors and psychiatrists (although both these approaches can be helpful). There's a range of professional options available including:

- Teachers at school – both in an academic capacity to help understand subjects better, as tutors to help create better ways of working outside school and pastoral experts who can help with emotional issues. Remember, schools may be closed but teachers are still available and can be contacted (in term time);
- Some schools have an independent counsellor available with whom your children can talk in confidence (i.e. they will not relay the information to the school);
- Peer support networks – these can be very helpful as speaking to someone of a similar age can sometimes feel easier than speaking to an adult, or speaking to someone just slightly older, who has more recently been through a similar experience can be very reassuring;
- Charities – most now offer both online and telephone support. This anonymity (i.e. not being face-to-face) can make talking over problems and worries easier.

Too much anxiety

If your child is showing several signs of anxiety on a regular basis (several days each week) over a prolonged period of time (several weeks) then do seek help from external support services mentioned above. We are currently experiencing exceptional circumstances likely to increase anxiety levels in all of us, so try to introduce daily exercises proven to reduce stress.

Useful links

mind for better mental health | SAMARITANS | AnxietyUK | BIG WHITE WALL

Final words

With schools temporarily closed, it might feel as if the responsibility for your child achieving their potential at A level currently falls to you. This is not true. There's plenty of support that their school or college can still provide. Don't forget, your child is accountable too – they are working towards their future.

Your child will still rely on you to provide support at home, but don't feel you need to police their school work. You can give a guiding hand to make sure they're on the right path, but you cannot do the work for them.

We all have good days and bad. Inevitably there will be days when your teen isn't doing all that they should. Don't turn each of these into a battle, life is already hard enough. Accept that some days will not be as productive as others.

Many of the suggestions in this guide not only offer ways for you to help your child study at home, as well as effective ways to study, they help to promote mental resilience and general wellbeing. That is paramount for your child, and equally important for you too. Don't forget yourself. It's much harder to be strong and supportive if you are under par, so take some time each day to nurture yourself.

Academic qualifications are important, but they do not define your child's future. There's no doubt that doing well at A level opens doors but, if during this difficult year your child doesn't do as well as you'd hoped, there are other routes and options to a happy and fulfilling future.
Focus on creating a calm, balanced and secure homelife that brings happiness to the whole family. It may not seem that way now, but far too soon your teen will be leaving home to carve out their own path. Whenever you can, make the best of this time together and enjoy it.

Join us

If your interested in regular updates about other ways you can help your teenage children, **visit www.theparentsguideto.co.uk/join-us** and join our online community or follow us on social media.

Visit **The Parents' Guide to** website for more support and resources:

Parent Guides

Our range of interactive guides provide you with easy to follow advice, hyperlinks to reliable sources and the most up-to-date information.

Support articles

Browse through our collection of online articles covering a range of topics from supporting your child with their revision to helping them apply to university through UCAS.

Parent Q&A

Almost every parent has questions about their child's education. Read through answers to commonly asked questions or ask your own.

Blog

Our blog provides reliable and timely advice and support to changes taking place across UK schools and colleges.

Parent newsletter

Sign up to our parent newsletter and receive free support, advice and resources on how you can help your teenage children straight to your inbox.

All our resources are ready for immediate download

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The Parents' Guide to

STUDYING FOR A LEVELs IN 2020/2021

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