

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH EXAM PREPARATION



CARDINAL HEENAN
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

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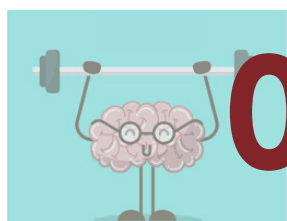
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HOME SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP



The run up to year 11 exams is a challenging time for many young people and their families. Students are aware of the importance of their grades, not just for their next steps but as an encapsulation of their hard work during their five years at Cardinal Heenan and eleven years of formal schooling. This can result in students feeling pressure, real or perceived, from themselves, school, families and wider society.

At Cardinal Heenan, we recognise the vital role of parents/carers as the first and most important educators. It can be difficult to know how to best support your child during this time, not least because so much of what they will be examined on has been consigned to the realms of your own youth!

*You have gathered us together as members
of one body.
Grant that we may realise our responsibilities
to one another
And may truth, honour and kindness abound
amongst us
Our School Prayer*

It is our intention, through the information provided in this booklet along with our How to Prepare for Exams Workshop, to equip you with knowledge of how your child has been taught to prepare for their exams. We hope that this will open up conversations within your family, and empower you with the information, skills and resources you need to support your child through this time.

Within this we will cover:

- Effective revision strategies
- Guidance on how to organise revision
- Advice on supporting wellbeing
- Signposting additional external sources of support

Through working together, we hope that your child will be supported in a unified, consistent way, enabling them to fulfil their potential. To this end, we encourage you to contact us with any questions or suggestions that you have. Contact details can be found on the back cover of this booklet.

ACTIVE REVISION

- EFFECTIVE REVISION INVOLVES THINKING HARD
 - RETRIEVAL NOT RE-READING
 - YOU WILL GET THINGS WRONG – AND THAT'S OKAY!
-



Effective revision feels challenging. Just like physical training, **mental training requires effort**. If you wanted to build muscle, you would lift heavy weights. And do so repeatedly and regularly. The same principles apply to building memory (which is what we are aiming for in revision).

Many of the revision techniques that students prefer (such as re-reading notes and highlighting), require little mental energy. This is why they feel good. Unfortunately, this also means that they are unlikely to lead to long term memory. Furthermore, these techniques can result in The Illusion of Knowledge. The Illusion of Knowledge occurs when you read through something familiar and have a sense of knowing it, without checking you really understand and can remember it all.

Techniques that are more effective require students to **recall or retrieve** information from their memory without looking it up. Possible retrieval activities include:

- Completing past paper questions
- Self-quizzing using the look, cover, say, write, check method
- The Lietner flashcard method
- Brain dump
- Online tests, such as Seneca Learning, MyMaths and BBC Bitesize.

Using these "heavy-lifting" methods will mean that you **make some mistakes**. This is to be expected, and research shows that you are more likely to remember things that you once got wrong (The Hyper-Correction Effect). Through using these techniques, that make you think hard, you are more likely to remember what you have learnt in the long term.

SPACED PRACTICE

- LITTLE AND OFTEN
- REVISIT TOPICS YOU FIND HARD MORE REGULARLY

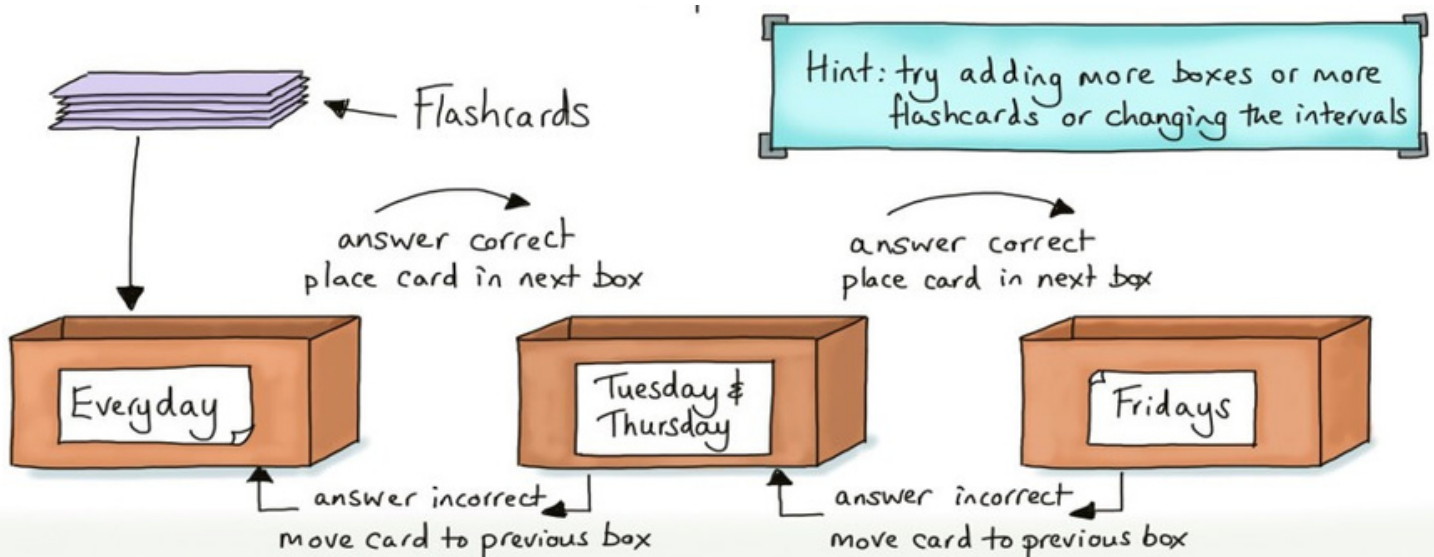
Spacing out revision means that you are more likely to remember things in the long term. This means you should aim to do little and often, particularly when you are trying to learn facts.

How long to spend on a piece of revision will depend on the subject. In most cases, you should aim to keep each revision slot between **30 and 45 minutes**, with a break in between. This is because, just like your body, your brain gets tired and when this happens you are less likely retain information. There are some exceptions to this; for example, it is important that you build your writing stamina for English and history to enable you to write for 2 hours at a time. This is something your teachers will help you to do in lessons.

For more information on individual subjects, please see the "How to Revise for ..." videos on our school website.

You should revisit topics and subjects that you find difficult more regularly. One way to do this is to do the subjects and topics that you find hardest early on in the day. This is when your brain is freshest and most able to think hard. It also means you get a sense of achievement from doing something you didn't want to.

To help you space out your learning in a subject, you can use **the Lietner method** with flashcards. For this you will need flashcards and three boxes labelled: Everyday: Tuesday & Thursday; and Friday. Initially all flashcards start in the Everyday box. If you can correctly recall the fact it moves to the box on the right. If you cannot, it goes back in the Everyday box (see diagram below). This system ensures your revision is focused on the topics you find most challenging.



PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT



Using retrieval methods of revision means that it is essential that you check your work is correct. This is because practice makes permanent: you will remember what you practice, and if this is wrong you need to know so that you can correct it. Just like we do in school, using a green pen to mark and correct your work allows you to highlight errors, decreasing the chance you will make the same mistake again. There is also a real sense of achievement to be had when you get things right that will help you to stay motivated to keep revising.

For further information on how to check your answers in each subject, please see the "How to Revise" videos on our school website.

**Strengthening
the Student Toolbox**
Study Strategies to Boost Learning

A colorful illustration showing a group of students in a study environment. One student is sitting on a large red toolbox labeled 'STUDY' and looking at a calendar. Another student is holding a large sheet of paper labeled 'PRACTICE QUIZ'. A third student is holding a large sheet of paper labeled 'CALENDAR'. A fourth student is holding a large sheet of paper labeled '3 2'. The toolbox is filled with various study materials like books, papers, and a pencil. The background is a warm, orange-yellow gradient.

BY JOHN DUNLOVSKY

It's the night before her biology exam, and the high school student has just begun to study. She takes out her highlighter and reads her textbook, marking it up as she goes along. She reads sentences that seem most important and stays up most of the night, just hoping to get a good enough grasp of the material to do well on the exam. These are study strategies that she may have learned from her friends or her teachers or that she simply took to on her own. She is not unusual in this regard; many students rely on strategies such as highlighting, rereading, and cramming the night before an exam.

Quite often, students believe these relatively ineffective strategies are actually the most effective,¹ and at least on the surface they do seem sound, perhaps because, even after pulling an all-nighter, students manage to squeak by on exams. Unfortunately, in a recent review of the research, my colleagues and I found that these strategies are not that effective,² especially if students want to retain their learning and understanding of content well after the exam is over—obviously, an important educational goal.

So, why aren't students learning about the best strategies? I can only speculate, but several reasons seem likely. Curricula are developed to highlight the content that teachers should teach, so the focus is on providing content and not on training students how to effectively acquire it. Put differently, the emphasis is on what students need to learn, whereas little emphasis—if any—is placed on training students how they should go about learning the content and what skills will promote efficient studying to support robust learning. Nevertheless, teaching students how to learn is as important as teaching them content, because acquisition

John Dunlosky is a professor of psychology and the director of experimental training at Kent State University. His research focuses on self-regulated learning and how it can be used to improve student achievement across the lifespan.

For further information on effective revision strategies, the article "Strengthening the Student Toolbox" by Professor John Dunlosky is an excellent starting point. It is easily accessible via google.

There are a range of informative and easy to follow YouTube videos available that show the Lietner method in action, and explain how it can be adapted to suit different subjects.

**FURTHER
INFORMATION**

INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS

- DIFFERENT SUBJECTS REQUIRE DIFFERENT METHODS
- USE THE "HOW TO REVISE..." VIDEOS ON OUR WEBSITE

Each school subject is unique, and requires a slightly different approach to revision. Furthermore, the resources that you require will be different for each subject. This booklet gives an overview of the universal principles of effective revision. To help you understand how to revise for each subject, our Curriculum Leaders have each put together a brief video outlining:

- How to most effectively revise for their subject
- Where to find relevant resources
- How to check your answers are correct

These are all available on the Curriculum section of our school website.



ORGANISING YOUR REVISION



MAKE A TIMETABLE

Making and using a revision timetable is an excellent way of ensuring you use your time effectively. We recommend that you complete around 1-2 hours of revision on a school day, and around 4 hours of revision on a non-school day.

Make sure to schedule breaks, extra-curricular activities and time with friends and family.



LITTLE AND OFTEN

Most revision slots should last around 30-45 minutes to ensure that your brain is active and taking-in information.

Aim to place the subjects and topics that you find hardest earlier in the day when your brain is more active.

To ensure you cover all of the material you need to, be as specific as possible, e.g. "Geography: Coasts".



SHARE AND USE IT

For a revision timetable to be effective, you need to stick to it. A good way to do this is to share it with your family. This allows them to help you to achieve your aim.

Once you have completed a revision session, tick it off on your timetable. Over time this will form a visual reminder of all of the revision that you have done, helping you to feel a sense of accomplishment and recognise your hard work.

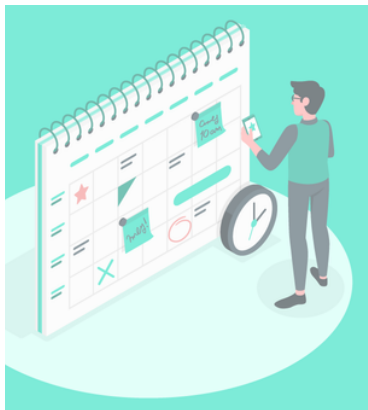
GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR REVISION



GATHER ALL OF THE RESOURCES YOU NEED

Before you start, make sure that you have all of the resources and equipment you need to hand. Think about: pens, highlighters and calculator; your exercise book and/or revision guide; websites (if appropriate); and revision lists.

This means that during your revision session you will be able to focus on what you are learning.



IDENTIFY WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE

Before you start, identify what you hope to achieve by the end of the session. Be as specific as possible. For example, "understanding angles" is better than "know more maths", but even better is "being able to identify angles in parallel lines".

This will make your revision more focused and will allow you to know whether you have achieved what you set out to.



CHECK YOU HAVE ACHIEVED IT

At the end of your session, check back over whether you have achieved what you set out to.

This means that you will feel a sense of achievement for all that you have done, and will allow you to plan your next session. It is a good idea to note down at the end of one revision session anything you need to follow up next time you revise this subject.

WELLBEING

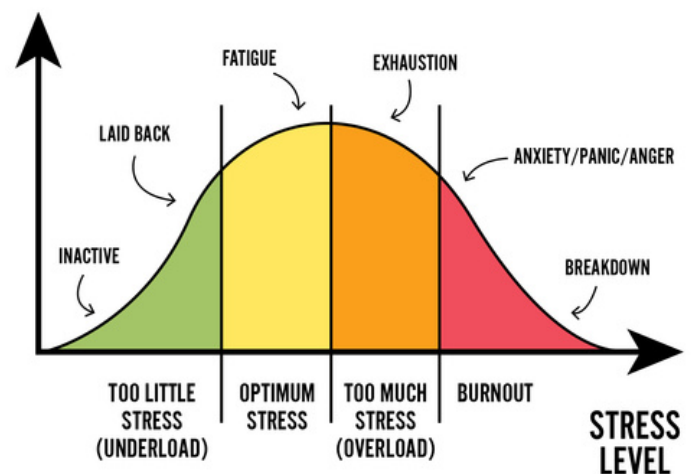
- IT IS NORMAL TO WORRY ABOUT EXAMS
- ACTIVE STRATEGIES CAN HELP TO AVOID STRESS

Preparing for exams is often a stressful time for young people (and their families). We are keen that our students understand that worrying about exams is perfectly normal. In fact, a certain amount of stress can improve performance, motivating us to prepare effectively.

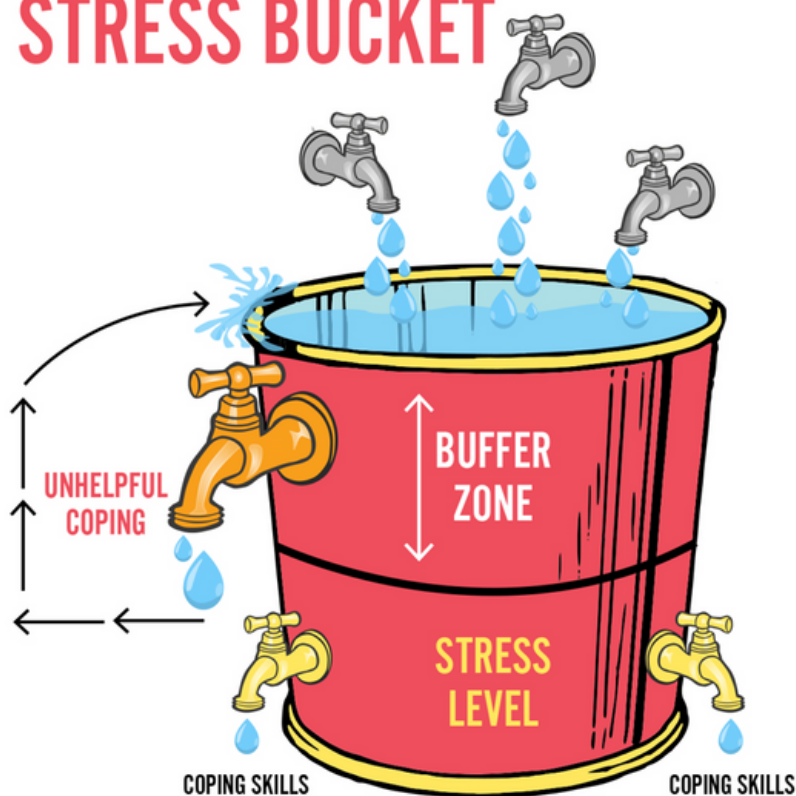
We all need to develop strategies to help us manage our worries and keep stress levels at an acceptable level.

Within school, we use the analogy of the stress bucket to help students to understand and manage how they are feeling. Everything that we encounter in life can affect our mental health in either a positive or negative way.

PERFORMANCE



STRESS BUCKET



As we worry about things like exams, our future or relationships, stress can start to build up and feel overwhelming. This is like water flowing into a bucket: if the water keeps coming then eventually the bucket will overflow.

To prevent this from happening, we need to either empty the bucket or reduce the amount of water in it. This can be done by putting holes in our stress bucket. These holes are the various strategies that we use to reduce feelings of stress and worry.

REFRAMING YOUR THINKING

Sometimes, when people are worried they engage in unhelpful thinking patterns. Examples of this include:

- All or nothing thinking e.g. "If I am not perfect then I have failed"
- Disqualifying the positive, e.g. overlooking previous successes
- Over-generalising, e.g. "I am rubbish at everything"
- Catastrophising, e.g. "if I don't know X then I will fail and never get a job"

These unhelpful thinking patterns often have a negative impact on how we feel. They can, however, be addressed through a series of structured questions that help to restructure the thinking. These are based on the Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy approach.



01 Tell me about your negative or unhelpful thoughts



05 What would you tell your best friend if they had this thought?



02 How does that make you feel?



06 What is a more helpful thought?



03 Is this thought necessarily true?



07 What actions can you take now?



04 What evidence do you have that this thought is not true?

Questions are often helpful, because they prevent us from feeling lectured. Rather they empower us to find the solutions for ourselves. Thus they may have a longer lasting impact.

MANAGING THE PHYSICAL FEELINGS OF WORRY

It is entirely normal to feel worried before an exam – it is a sign that you care. This can be accompanied by physical symptoms such as strong and fast heartbeat, stomach pain and nausea, or tension and headaches. The following strategies can help to manage these physical feelings. They will help you to feel better, refocus your brain and calm your nerves.



DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

This works by slowing your breathing and fully fill your lungs with air, increasing the amount of oxygen in your body.

- Place a hand on your stomach
- Breathe in through your nose for the count of 4. Your belly should expand as you fill your lungs with air
- Hold your breath briefly
- Breathe out through your mouth for the count of 7
- Repeat



GROUNDING

This works by helping you to focus on what is around you, taking attention away from the intrusive thoughts in your mind. Look around you and notice

- 5 things that you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

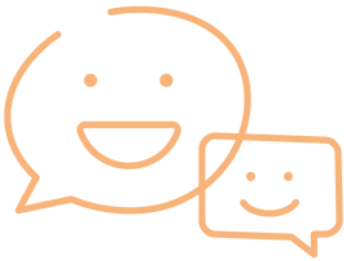
This works by increasing tension in an area of your body to help you then fully release this. Focusing on this also calms your mind.

- Curl up your toes and feet. Hold for a count of 5. Release.
- Tense the muscles in your calves. Hold for a count of 5. Release.
- Squeeze your thighs together. Hold for a count of 5. Release.
- Suck in your stomach. Hold for a count of 5. Release.
- Pull your shoulders up high. Hold for a count of 5. Release.
- Make fists and tense your arms. Hold for a count of 5. Release.
- Screw up your face and frown. Hold for a count of 5. Release.

HOW CAN PARENTS/ CARERS SUPPORT WELLBEING?

The following guidance is taken from the Anna Freud Centre, who work to support and uphold young people's mental health. The principles are informed by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), a therapeutic approach most commonly used to treat anxiety. CBT is recognised by the NHS NICE guidelines as a suitable evidence based treatment.

CREATE SPACE FOR CONVERSATION



Demonstrate that you are available to talk but don't force the conversation at the wrong time as this may feel intrusive. Be open and consistently available, allowing conversation to flow when the young person is ready and willing to talk.

Children and young people often find it easier to talk while doing another activity, such as drawing, going for a walk or baking.



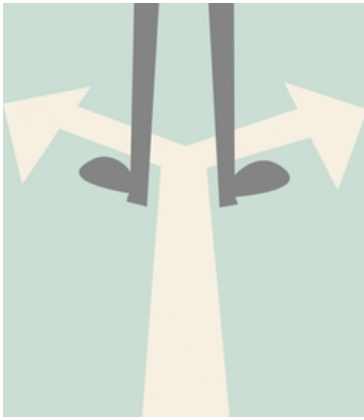
DEMONSTRATE CALM

Try to model a calm and measured response. We know that children are good at noticing when others around them are anxious and will watch the behaviour of others to work out whether they too should feel anxious themselves. Even if you're feeling anxious on the inside, you can help the young person by remaining calm on the outside. This will help to reassure them that things might be difficult, but they are manageable.

EMPATHISE AND VALIDATE

We often want to reassure children, and to help find solutions to make them feel better. But first, spend time listening to the young person, ask them questions, and show an interest in viewing things from their perspective. Be accepting of their worry, anger and sadness about how things are at present. Try to avoid early reassurance which can often sound like "everything's fine". Recognise that these kinds of feelings are common and understandable.





INTRODUCE ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

A worry is a thought, not necessarily a fact. Listen to the young person and try to understand exactly what they are concerned about. What exactly are they worried about, and are their worries likely to happen? If so, what would it mean if they did? Exploring alternative ways of looking at things might help to put worries into perspective and in turn result in less anxiety-provoking conclusions.



REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSES

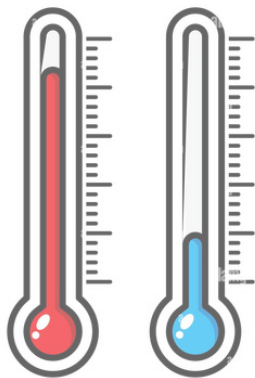
Help the young person to consider and recognise what makes anxiety worse, for example constant exposure to stressful stimuli such as too much social media. Try to keep to a routine, with activities throughout the day (e.g. schoolwork, exercise, relaxing, socialising and sleep). However, don't add pressure if they seem overwhelmed. Instead, emphasise the importance of self-care and being kind to themselves.



PROBLEM SOLVING AND COPING

Emphasise confidence in the young person's ability to cope and help them to think about different strategies. E.g.;

- (a) Future and action orientation: '...so what are we going to do about this? We can't do X... but we can do Y...'
- (b) Holding the hope: that somehow this situation may make space for something different and better to happen.
- (c) Keeping up healthy habits – school and domestic routines.



CHECK-IN AND MONITOR PROGRESS

A critical part of the process is to carefully observe the impact of any suggestions/changes in approach with the young person. This could be done using an Anxiety Thermometer which is based on the child's response; 0 being calm and content to 10 being extremely anxious, hopefully by taking these steps the young person's Anxiety Thermometer will reduce over time.

FURTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES MAY BE USEFUL IF YOU REQUIRE ANY FURTHER SUPPORT FOR YOUR CHILD'S WELLBEING



MINDMATE LEEDS

MindMate are here to identify support for children and young people in Leeds with their emotional wellbeing or mental health. It is for all children and young people who have a Leeds GP, of school age and under the age of 18. They work with a variety of services in order to find the right support.



KOOTH

Kooth is a free, safe and anonymous online chat and emotional wellbeing service for young people aged 11 to 25. Kooth has trained friendly councillors who can help you talk through your problems and help you with anything that's on your mind.



THE ANNA FREUD CENTRE

The mission of the Anna Freud Centre is to transform the experience of children, young people and their families through supporting their mental wellbeing. Their website contains advice and guidance for parents and carers to help them support a young person experiencing poor mental health.

CONTACT US



PHONE NUMBER

0113 887 3240



EMAIL ADDRESS

info@cardinalheenan.com