



## 10 - Steps to helping children stress less in the run up to tests.

As a mum and a teacher of primary school aged children, I have seen my own son and children in schools as young as 6 and 7 suffer from the stress of tests to a high level. Due to the nature of today's UK Education System, being full of high stakes testing and league tables, the stress children sometimes feel they are under from schools/teachers/parents/peers and themselves is huge. Some children find it all too much and it is up to us as adults to ease the pressures on them and give them strategies to cope, tests are part of life even as adults, so we have to support children in their knowledge of how best to deal with them.

### **Stop over working/over revising.**

One of the biggest stress hurdles for children is over learning/revising. In schools they are expected to pay attention and learn several subjects, not just one or two, they also are encouraged to do after school clubs/extra revision activities. When they get home they have a little down time to eat, but then they are expected to complete more homework meaning they are going to bed exhausted. They need time away from homework and learning to rejuvenate. Rest is just as important as learning, so there needs to be a balance.

There is a place for homework, but not every night and weekend. Even when it is coming up to SATS testing time, children still need time to have fun and 'be kids'. Don't pressure them with endless revision and practice tests.

### **Have time outdoors at weekends and after school**

Go for walks, meet friends, have time with family. Physical activity is great for easing stress and well-being.

### **Get plenty of sleep**

If children are not getting enough sleep, create an environment that relaxes them, limit IPADS/TV at night time, read stories together, make sure their bedroom is a relaxing environment. Waking at night is a sign of over thinking and cramming in too much in the day. Reduce activities to allow children more time to relax, it is normal to feel nervous and we all feel it sometimes, but feeling ill throughout the day, becoming upset and waking up during the night could be a sign that there is too much going on for them to focus on.

### **Think about how you handle your own stress as a teacher/parent/carer**

As adults we are all role models, children observe how we deal with situations and can often pick up on signs that all isn't well. When adults are not coping great, this can have an affect on how children cope. Children need to see adults being calm and not rushing around all the time in order to learn from them. If class teachers/parents/carers are stressed and shouting at children or becoming frustrated about things, this will raise the pressure on the children.



### Don't make mistakes a big deal

Some children have a fear of making mistakes, as a teacher I made mistakes intentionally in front of the children regularly, so the children could learn that it is actually fine to make them, because we need to get things wrong in order to learn from them and get them right. Again children learn from adults, so we need to teach them how to recover from making a mistake, i.e. look at what they did wrong, work out what we need to do to put it right, learn from it and move on, dealt with! Sometimes we need to remember to teach this to children and support them in their understanding that mistakes are part of learning.

### Put the tests in perspective

These tests are not going to define your child's life, if they don't get the score they want, it doesn't matter. Children can work on the things they found difficult and will improve when they are ready. Worrying that they won't make the grade or that they will let anyone down will prevent them from thinking clearly. It is just a test to give schools the knowledge of where children are with their learning and should be treated as that.

### Breathing deeply

This helps to relax your mind and body. Take long and deep breaths.

### Try to stay positive

Negative feelings and thoughts make us all more anxious. "What if I do badly?" "What if I can't remember anything?" Try to change these thoughts to "I can work on the things I find hard", "I am much more than this test score".

### Focus on right now

All our worries are 'what might happen'. Think about one thing at a time and focus on what you are doing right now.

### Enjoy learning new things

Life is for living and enjoying new experiences, remember a test score doesn't define you!