

Tips on Supporting your Teenager During the HSC

Young people will now, more than ever, need help and support from parents/caregivers during their HSC after experiencing changes in their learning and home environments over the past few months. Below are our tips for parents/caregivers on 11 ways to support your teenager during the coming weeks of HSC preparation and exams.

1. Daily Encouragement & Positivity

What teenagers hear from a parent can be so powerful, so give your teenager daily encouragement and positive words. Do this by communicating that you are proud of them or that you see they are doing their best.

Be realistic. It is a challenging time for HSC students, and unrealistic expectations can lead to stress and procrastination. Encouraging your teenager to do their personal best will positively affect their self confidence.

3. Help them Create a Schedule

Help your teenager create a plan that includes scheduled study days and times, even a schedule for each subject. Ensure the schedule includes rest breaks such as time for exercise and relaxation. Having a schedule can reduce stress, worry and anxiety, and it can help both you and your teenager to feel more prepared for the exams.

5. Ask them to Teach You

Help your teenager learn by being their 'student'. Ask them to tell you about the plots in the novels they've studied, key learnings of their history units, or significant chemical processes. It's a proven fact that reciting information out loud and teaching it to someone is an important strategy for memory and learning.

2. Keep Things in Perspective

It's great to motivate teenagers to give it their best shot, but remind them that there will be options if they don't get the HSC marks they want. There are numerous pathways to life goals, including TAFE, apprenticeships, other Uni pathways, college, and more.

Evidence also shows that it could take a few years after school for a person to work out what they really want to do with their lives.

4. Provide a Calm Environment

Allow your teenager a quiet space to study, and be mindful of the noise at home. This might mean changing the family routine to accommodate the times they want to study, vacuuming a little later in the day, keeping the TV low and limiting other distractions. Talk to other children and young people so they can help out with this.

6. Help them Challenge Negative Thinking

Our thoughts influence how we feel and what we do. For example, if your teenager is thinking to themselves "It's all too hard" about studying, this can cause feelings of despair, and they may procrastinate. Help them challenge any negative thinking by asking them questions like:

- What would you say to a good friend in this situation?
 - How realistic is your thought?
 - What's the worst outcome? What's the best outcome?
- Are there other, positive ways of looking at this?

7. Nutrition, Sleep & Exercise is Vital

Even though there might be a tendency to eat sweets or other junk food during times of stress, there is a strong link between what we eat and how we feel so ensure your teenager is eating healthy meals and snacks, and drinking plenty of water to help with their wellbeing. Encourage they get a good night's sleep of 8-10hrs, which helps with attention, memory and learning.

Encourage your teenager to spend time outdoors to refresh. Activities like walking, kicking a soccer ball, or a short fitness routine, are important for your teenager's overall wellbeing and can help with studies too.

9. Choose to Let Things Go

With emotions potentially heightened across the family, it's time to go easy on everyone and everything, and that includes going easy on yourself. If something isn't really worth the stress of the argument, think about just letting it go for now. Accept that rooms might not be clean, manners might not be at the usual standard and moods possibly more up and down. Take a deep breath, be aware of your own emotions, and where possible, let it go.

8. Celebrate the Small Wins

Show your teenager praise, not just if they get a good exam mark or ranking, but also at the end of each day or week, when they complete a study session, or when they keep to their study routine. With so many demands and pressures placed on them this year, some positive motivation and encouragement can go a long way for their self-confidence and mind state. The HSC year is a journey and every success, big or small, should be celebrated.

10. Look after Yourself

As parents and carers, it's important that you look after yourselves during this time and not let your own anxiety spiral out of control, which can impact not only your teenager but your own mental and physical health. Let them take responsibility for their own study, and don't see it as a reflection of your parenting if, for whatever reason, they can't buckle down. Monitor your own self-talk, avoid buying into myths that this is the only pathway for a future, and take time for yourself – whether that be exercise, reading, listening to music, gardening or anything positive that fills your own cup up.

11. Look out for any Warning Signs of Mental Health Concerns

Look out for the below mental health "Red Flags" that your teenager might be feeling or showing:

- Sleep problems, fatigue or feeling sick a lot.
- Low self-esteem and overly self-critical.
- Engaging in unhealthy and harmful coping strategies such as self-harming or substance misuse.
 - Significant weight loss/or weight gain, loss or change of appetite.
 - Abandonment or loss of interest in favourite pastimes.
- Emotional changes, such as aggressiveness, excess anger, sadness or high level of anxiety.
 - Negative thoughts or speech which are worrying eg. feeling worthless.

Support is Available

If you are concerned about the mental health of your teenager, please talk to a trusted professional. 2Connect offers free support services for young people and their families in the Bayside, Georges River or Sutherland Council regions. Phone us on 95561769 or read how we can help [here](#). Other support services are Parentline 1300 1300 52 (or for teenagers) Kids Helpline 24hrs on 1800 55 1800