

KNOW! TO HELP KIDS MANAGE TEST SEASON STRESS

MAY 2026

As the school year winds down, there's plenty for students to look forward to. Events like prom, graduation, and the anticipation of summer break can bring excitement and a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, this season brings final exams, major projects, and heightened pressure to perform academically. Some stress about school can be healthy and motivating, helping kids stay on task and focus on their academic performance. However, too much stress can become overwhelming and unhealthy, and begin to affect a child's mental health, daily functioning, and overall well-being.

As a caregiver, your support plays a key role in helping your child manage test season stress. Here are several ways you can help your child cope with school-related stress in a healthy and productive way.

KNOW THE SIGNS OF STRESS

Stress looks different for everyone, and it's important to recognize how it may appear in your child. Common signs include headaches or stomachaches, sleep changes, irritability, mood swings, and difficulty concentrating. While these can be part of normal, short-term stress, ongoing or worsening symptoms that interfere with daily life may signal unhealthy stress.

Watch for more significant changes, such as withdrawing from friends and family, declining academic performance, or losing interest in activities they once enjoyed. These can be signs your child may need additional support from a mental health professional.

TALKING TIP

Ask open-ended questions to better understand your child's experience. You might try, "What's your biggest worry when you're taking a test?" or "How does your body feel when you're stressed?" These types of questions encourage conversation and help you gain insight into their emotions.

UNDERSTAND THEIR ANXIETY

Taking time to truly listen to your child can make a meaningful difference. Encourage them to share their feelings about tests, grades, and other stressors by asking open questions like, "How are you feeling about final exams?"

When they share, practice active listening by giving them your full attention and avoiding the urge to immediately solve the problem. Often, feeling heard and understood can bring relief.

TALKING TIP

Validate their feelings. Even if their worries seem small from an adult perspective, they are real and significant to your child. Dismissing their concerns can make them feel misunderstood or reluctant to share in the future. Avoid phrases like, "It's just one test" or "That's not a big deal." Instead, respond with empathy: "I can see why that feels stressful. Tests can feel like a lot of pressure."

CREATE A ROUTINE

Some stress around testing and final exams comes from feeling unprepared. Helping your child create a consistent routine with time for studying, activities, rest, and relaxation can provide a sense of control and preparedness.

Encourage study sessions in manageable chunks with short breaks to help prevent burnout and improve focus. A balanced routine also supports healthy sleep and downtime, both of which are important for managing stress.

TALKING TIP

After trying a study routine for a few weeks, check in with your child. Ask questions like, "Which study habits have you noticed work best for you?" or "Is there anything we should change to make this schedule feel better?" Then, work together to improve the routine.

EMPHASIZE EFFORT

Many students put pressure on themselves to achieve high grades, which can increase anxiety. Help reduce this pressure by focusing on effort, growth, and persistence rather than perfection.

Remind your child that test scores and report cards do not define their worth or potential. Success is about learning, improving, and doing their best.

TALKING TIP

Reflect on the messages you send to your children, even if unintentionally. If your first question to them when they get home is "How did you do on the test?" you may be implying that grades matter more than anything else. Instead, try asking, "What did you learn today?" or "What was the most interesting part of your day?"

BUILD COPING SKILLS

Teaching your child healthy ways to manage stress can have lasting benefits beyond test season. Encourage habits that support balance, like getting enough sleep, taking study breaks, and making time for enjoyable activities.

You can also introduce calming techniques such as deep breathing, visualization, or using a stress ball to help manage anxiety in the moment. Practice these skills regularly when things are calm so they become part of your child's routine.

TALKING TIP

Practice techniques together. For example, instead of just saying, "Take deep breaths," try a deep breathing exercise and reflect on how you feel before and after trying this skill. You might find that these techniques help you to handle your end-of-the-school-year stress as well.

SOURCES:

- [Tips for Beating Test Anxiety | Child Mind Institute](#)
- [5 Ways to Help Your Child Manage Test-Taking Anxiety | St. Luke's Penn Foundation](#)
- [How to Help Your Child Handle the Stress of Finals | Cincinnati Children's](#)
- [How to Help Your Child with Test Anxiety | UNC Healthcare](#)
- [School Stress: 10 Ways Parents Can Help Kids Manage Stress | Partnership to End Addiction](#)
- [Supporting Teen Mental Health During Exam Season | Community Choice Pediatrics](#)

RESOURCES:

- [Helping Kids with Test Anxiety | Kids Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Under pressure: Helping your child or teen cope with school-related stress | Atrium Health](#)
- [Know! How to Build Coping Skills Together | Prevention Action Alliance](#)
- [Test-Taking Anxiety Tips | JED Foundation](#)
- [School Stress: 10 Ways Parents Can Help Kids Manage Stress | Partnership to End Addiction](#)

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