

# SURF THE STRESS

...AND GET WET TRYING!



**A BBA GUIDE TO MANAGING EXAM STRESS**



**Year 11 can bring many exciting times...you are the top year of the school, it's the last year of GCSEs, it may be your last year of school altogether. It can also bring with it some stress with exams and making decisions for next year.**

**This booklet is designed with Year 11s in mind to describe how stress works, then to offer some suggestions of how to calm stress down so that you can complete the year in a more effective and helpful way.**

**We hope the following information is useful to you but please do not hesitate to come and see us if you have a question or would like more support in this area.**

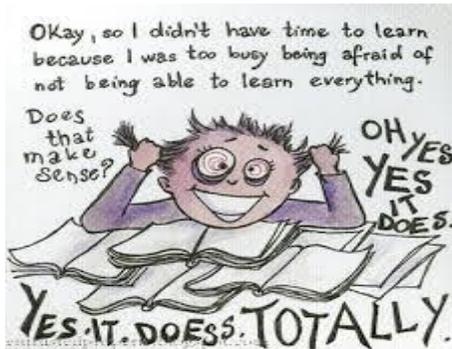
**Look after yourselves!**

***Zakera and Emma***

**BBA Counsellors**



## Before we start .....



.....let's keep things in perspective!

Exams might seem like the most important thing you have to focus on right now, but they are actually only a small part of your whole life and who you are.

There are thousands of successful people who didn't do as well as they wanted to in their exams. It's great to do well but remember you can only do your best.

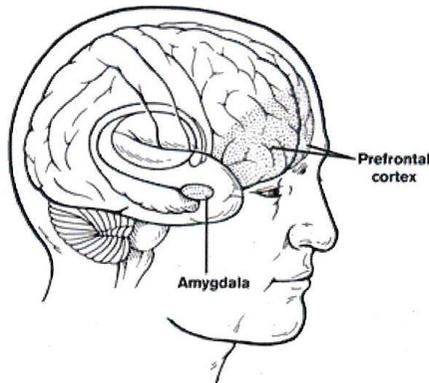
So.....**just do your best**..... that is all that you, your teachers and your loved ones ask of you. If you can look back after the exams and think to yourself, "I gave that my best shot" then, whatever the outcome, you can feel proud of what you did.



## What is stress?

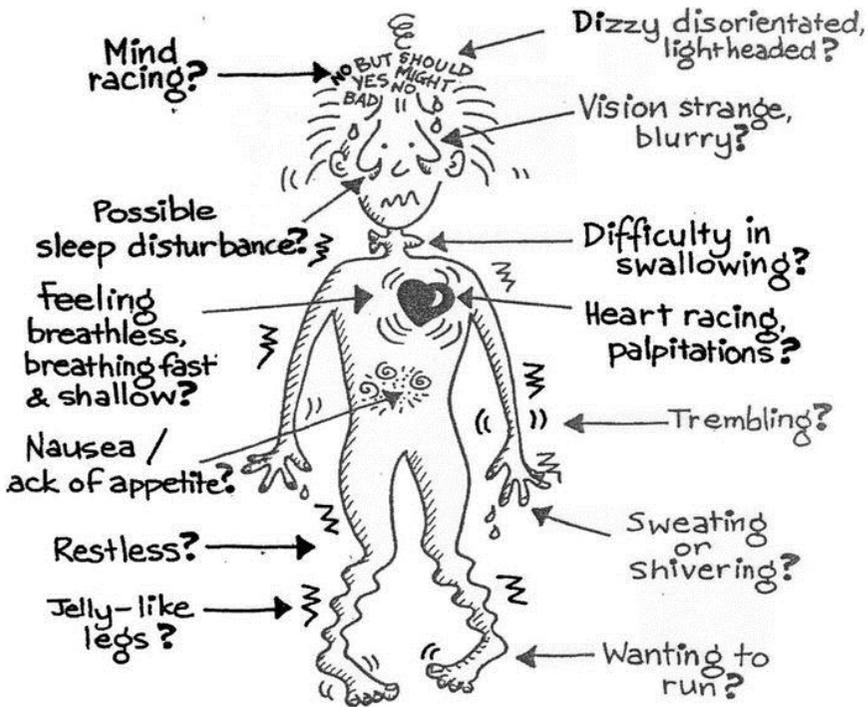
Stress is a natural, healthy bodily response which humans have evolved in order to protect them in times of danger. When an individual is faced with a stressor, a hormone is released within the body which causes various changes in the body; the heart begins to pump faster in order to supply the body's muscles with a larger supply of oxygen, blood pressure therefore increases and the body perspires more to prevent over-heating. Although this evolutionary advantage is excellent at preparing the body for a fight with a wild tiger, it's not as magnificent when it comes to doing exams.

Too much stress can make it almost impossible for you to focus and to recall things you have studied. This is because - due to that pesky evolutionary response again - the body releases large amounts of the stress hormone known as cortisol. Studies have shown that cortisol impairs the speed of memory retrieval in humans.



It is also due to the fact that we work out of a different part of the brain when we are stressed or emotional. This part is called the **amygdala**. When we are calm, we use our **prefrontal cortex**. It is the cortex that helps us think clearly, recall information and problem solve. When we are stressed or emotional, our amygdala hijacks our thinking and takes control. The amygdala isn't helpful when we are trying to focus or recall information. It is important, therefore, to **calm ourselves down and reduce cortisol** so that we are using the correct part of our brain otherwise we cannot access the information or skills we need.

## What does stress look like?



In order to give ourselves the best chance of passing our exams, we need to reduce stress.

We can do this in two main ways;

1. **Calming** down the amygdala (emotions) that hijack our thinking through techniques such as meditation, having fun and being kind to ourselves.
2. **Preparing** our environment as best we can so that the amygdala has less to worry about in the first place.

## Tips for Calming

Calming the amygdala means turning the volume down on it so that information can pass through to the frontal lobe. We can calm the amygdala down quickly by giving it something else to think about – distracting it. Try using the following methods – the more you focus on the activity, the more effective it is at calming the emotions/stress.

### 1. Hand Massage

What's great about it is that you can do it anywhere. No one will notice. Simply use the thumb of one hand and press around the palm of the other hand. It's very soothing.

### 2. Palm Push

By pushing your palms together and holding for five to ten seconds, you give your body "proprioceptive input," which "lets your body know where it is in space". The palm push is like a mini, portable yoga position that grounds you.

### 3. Closing Your Eyes

80% of sensory stimulation comes in through the eyes, so shutting them every now and then gives your brain a much-needed break.

### 4. Mindful Sighing

Breathe in to a count of five through your mouth, and then you let out a very loud sigh, the sound you hear a stropo teenager make! It's amazing how powerful those small sighs are to adjust energy levels and focus.



## **5. Mindful Monkey Stretch**

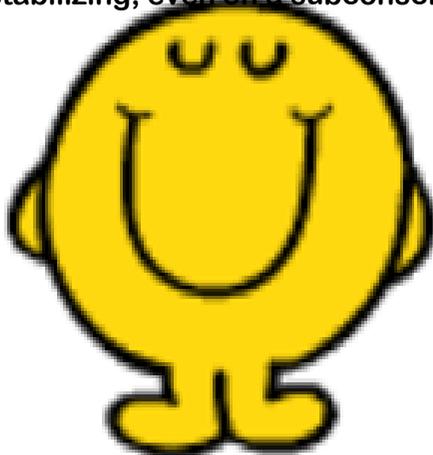
Stand up and bring your hands and arms extended in front of you, then down. Next extend your arms to your sides, and then down. Next bring your arms all the way past your head, close to your ears. Once fully extended, swoop down with your head dangling between your knees. Just hang there for a second. This exercise is extremely effective at releasing the tension we hold in different parts of our body. (Maybe not one to do IN the exam room!).

## **6. Hugging Yourself**

Did you know that a ten-second hug a day can change biochemical and physiological forces in your body that can lower risk of heart disease, combat stress, fight fatigue, boost your immune system, and ease depression? You can begin by giving yourself a hug. By squeezing your belly and back at the same time, you are again giving yourself proprioceptive input (letting your body know where you are in space) which can help stabilize you and balance your emotions a little more.

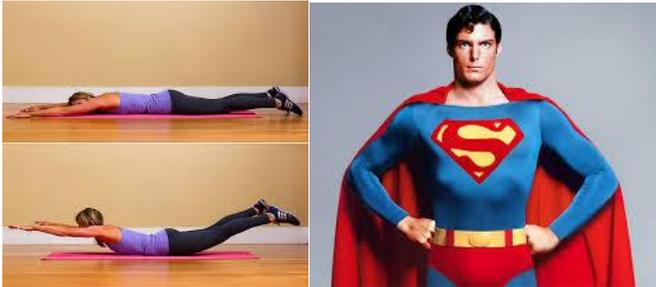
## **7. Wall Push**

Another great exercise to ground those with sensory issue is the wall push, where you simply push against the wall with flat palms and feet planted on the floor for five to ten seconds. Placing the weight of our body against a solid, immobile surface and feeling the pull of gravity is stabilizing, even on a subconscious level.



## 8. Superman Pose

Lie on your belly on the floor. Extend your arms in front of you, and hold them straight out. Extend your legs behind you and hold them straight out. Hold that pose for ten seconds. It's a great exercise if you are groggy, overexcited, distracted, or annoyed.



## 9. Shaking

Did you know that animals relieve their stress by shaking? Lots of animals like antelopes shake off their fear after being frozen in panic to escape a predator. It doesn't look all that pretty but it can be beneficial.

## 10. Bubble Breath

Place one flat palm on your heart, one flat palm on your belly. Breathe in through your nose and hold your breath for five seconds. Imagine you are breathing out into a bubble wand. When you breathe out, be careful not to pop the bubble. Breathe out a large "bubble" though pursed lips for five seconds.

Repeat as much as required.



## Tips for Preparation

**Get some decent sleep.** Research shows that there is 50% more cortisol in the blood stream if an individual has six hours' sleep instead of the recommended eight hours.

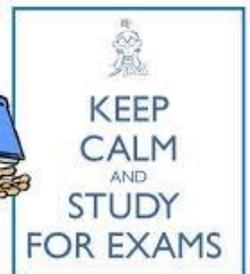
**Eat well.** It is also important for you to maintain a nutrition-rich diet, drink plenty of water and eat three meals a day; this will keep the cortisol hormone at a natural level and allow you to concentrate fully on the task at hand.

**Keep hydrated.** When you're feeling the effects of exam anxiety and your brain feels blank, take a drink of your water and breathe deeply and slowly. This will calm you down but also allow your body to rehydrate to stop the effects of the stress response. Dehydration means our body is less effective and so our ability to retain and recall information is affected.

**Plan ahead.** Don't leave revision to the last minute. Have your own revision timetable – starting well before exams begin. Make your books, notes and essays user-friendly. Use headings, highlighting and revision cards. Get tips on other revision techniques from your teachers and friends with experience of exams. You could also consider buying revision guides.

**Take notes** of the important points when revising. Try to answer the questions of past exam papers – explain answers to tricky questions to someone else. Everyone revises differently. Find out what routine suits you best - alone or with another; early morning or late at night; short, sharp bursts or longer sessions; with music or without noise.

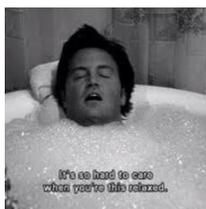
**Ask for help** from your teacher/learning mentor, parent/carer or a friend if there are things you don't understand.



**Don't cram before an exam. This will heighten the amygdala and your stress levels. Studies have shown that we actually do worse around the subject we cram before an exam as our brain will have focussed on this subject only and then become stressed if it can't recall it.**

**Look after Yourself.** Put yourself first – this is an important time for you. Try to talk to your family about how they can make studying a little easier for you – for example, by agreeing times when you can have your own space, when they will try to be a little quieter around the house and when you'd rather not be disturbed.

**Relax/Have fun.** Don't revise all the time. Make sure you give yourself time each day to relax, taking breaks to do something you enjoy – watch TV, listen to music, read a book, see friends, play games, have a bath or go out for a walk.



**Stop putting it off!** You can wait to be “in the mood” to revise or you can just get on with it as planned. Motivation follows action. Try doing a task for 10 minutes and see how you feel – usually mood will follow the task and you'll be more likely to continue doing it.

<http://lifehacker.com/six-scientifically-supported-ways-to-crush-procrastinat-589722729/all>

**Visualise.** Repeatedly picturing an outcome can help you achieve it (beware - it works for negative outcomes, too!) Picture yourself as a confident student, walking into the exam room, feeling calm and prepared. Picture yourself calmly reading the exam paper and being able to recall the information to answer it. Picture yourself finishing the exams, smiling, knowing you have done your best and feeling good.

## On the day

Have a good breakfast if you can.



Make sure you know where the exam is being held and what time it starts. Give yourself plenty of time to get there.

Take all the equipment you need for each exam, including extra pens and pencils (Perhaps get this ready the night before?).

Take in a bottle of water if you're allowed, otherwise drink a little water before you go in.

Go to the loo beforehand!



If you feel really anxious, breathe slowly and deeply while waiting for the exam to start. Keep your mind focussed on your breath where possible. This will ground it and calm down that amygdala. You can use this technique at any point. Plan how much time you'll need for each question.

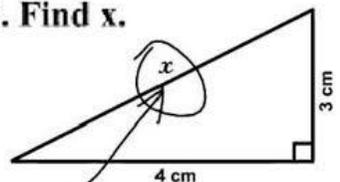
Read the instructions before starting the exam. Ask the teacher or exam supervisor if anything is unclear.

Read through all the questions before starting writing, and make sure you are clear how many questions you are required to answer. If there is a choice, start by answering the question you feel you can answer best.

If you are stuck on a question, go on to the next. You can always come back to it later. If you are really stuck, try to have an intelligent guess anyway.

Leave time to read through and check your answers before the exam finishes.

3. Find  $x$ .



*Here it is*

## **Yay! You did your best 😊**

Knowing that you've done your best means you haven't let anyone down, especially yourself.

Try to put the last exam out of your mind and look ahead to the next one. You can't go back and change things. Best not to go through the answers afterwards with your friends if it is only going to make you more worried

You're you, and you can only do the best you can on the day.

When the exams are over, pat yourself on the back – it's time to relax and forget about them. If you did well – congratulations! But remember, **there is life beyond exam results.**

Disappointing grades are not the end of the world, even if it does feel that way at the time. You might decide to re-sit and, in any case, there will be lots of other opportunities to express yourself and succeed later on in life

Although it may feel like the most important thing in the world, these tests ain't worth the physical strain that you're putting on your body if you stress about them.

### **Further tips can be found at:**

[www.examtime.com/blog/beat-exam-stress-10-easy-ways](http://www.examtime.com/blog/beat-exam-stress-10-easy-ways)

<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jan/08/five-secrets-of-successful-revising>

<http://www.revisionbuddies.com/>

[https://www.cgpbooks.co.uk/interactive\\_tips\\_exam](https://www.cgpbooks.co.uk/interactive_tips_exam)

<http://www.wikihow.com/Revise-Successfully>

<https://successatschool.org/advisedetails/161/Seven-of-the-Best-Free-Online-Revision-Toolsddies.com/>

## **Apps**

[www.examtime.com/blog/10-best-apps-for-college-students-2015](http://www.examtime.com/blog/10-best-apps-for-college-students-2015)

ExamPal

Examcountdown

SQS My Study Plan

## **Books (in the school library)**

Exam Skills – Kate Brookes

Beat Stress! The Exam Handbook – Anita Naik

## **Extra Support**

If you feel that you can't cope with the pressure or are feeling stressed, find someone to talk to. Don't bottle it up!

Try to talk to your teachers, family, Pastoral Year Leader, friends or other support.

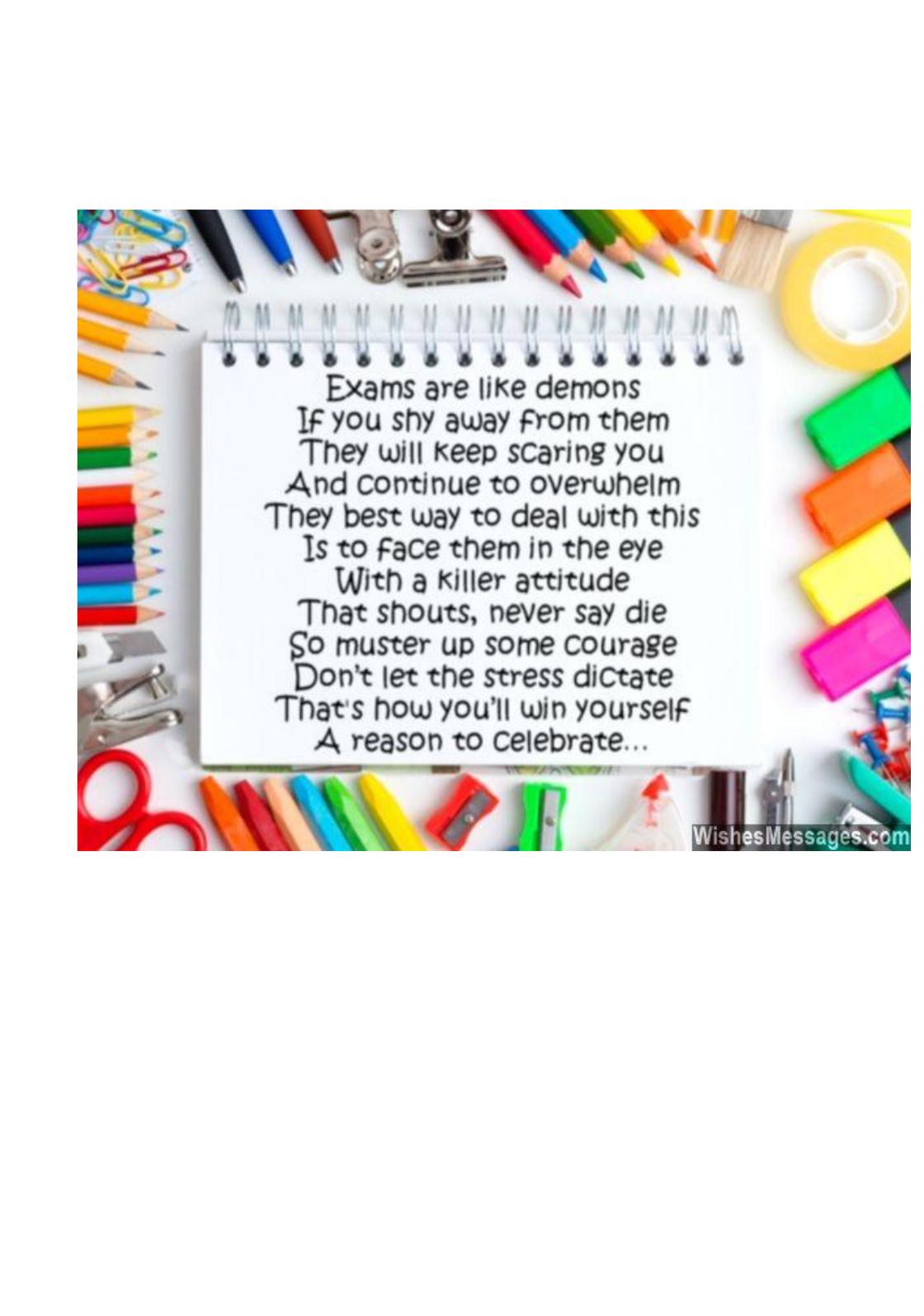
Zakera/Emma – BBA Counsellors

Off The Record – 0808 808 9120/07896 880011 – [otrbristol.org.uk](http://otrbristol.org.uk)

Childline - 0800 1111 (24 hours) - [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Exams are important – but they are not the only key to a successful future.**

**Go ahead - give it your best shot.**



Exams are like demons  
If you shy away from them  
They will keep scaring you  
And continue to overwhelm  
The best way to deal with this  
Is to face them in the eye  
With a killer attitude  
That shouts, never say die  
So muster up some courage  
Don't let the stress dictate  
That's how you'll win yourself  
A reason to celebrate...

EXAMS?



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED