



ISSUE 23

Mount Kelly's Safeguarding Bulletin aims to provide parents and carers with the information needed to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with their children about potential risks and issues in the wider world and online. This week's bulletin is on the topics of Mental Health Awareness Week and managing exam stress.

BENEFITS OF NATURE TO MENTAL HEALTH

Discover how being with nature improves our mental health and reduces stress.

- REDUCES ANXIETY**
Our bodies release less cortisol and more natural endorphins, which promote happy thoughts and good feelings.
- MORE FOCUSED**
There is fresh air, and less noise pollution while being with nature.
- IMPROVES CREATIVITY**
Less stress and anxiousness makes our minds more clear and open to creativity.
- CHANGE OF MOOD**
Being with nature makes us more calm and balanced. There is less mood change triggers.
- ALLOW TO DISCONNECT**
Distractions are reduced by forcing us to put down the phones and computers and to slow down.
- REDUCES BLOOD PRESSURE**
The muscles are not tensed when relaxed. Heart rate also normalises.

REFERENCES:

<http://www.businessinsider.com/scientific-benefits-of-nature-outdoors-2016-4>
<https://news.stanford.edu/2015/06/30/hiking-mental-health-063015/>
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_nature_makes_you_kinder_happier_more_creative
<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/environment/nature-and-us-how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/research-projects/research-projects/beyond-blue-to-green-the-health-benefits-of-contact-with-nature-in-a-park-context-literature-review>

For [Mental Health Awareness Week](#) we have been encouraging pupils to 'move for their mood' and emphasising the enormous impact regular movement has on our emotional wellbeing, including releasing feel-good endorphins, increasing self-esteem and improving sleep quality. We have also highlighted the benefits of **moving in nature**: some studies have found that this may reduce feelings of anger, fear and stress, while improving mood and mental wellbeing. Being outdoors is thought to reduce stress by lowering the stress hormone cortisol, which means that the rate of recovery from stress may be quicker in the natural environment than recovery from the same stressor indoors.

Exam stress – sometimes referred to as test anxiety – is of course a long-running issue for children and young people. The possible impact of exam stress on children's mental, emotional and physical wellbeing is difficult to overstate – and pupils' need for support is seldom greater than during these periods of their academic life. This week's **#WakeUpWednesday** guide offers you ten practical tips for helping young people to manage exam stress and minimise its potentially detrimental effects.

Further useful links for parents and children:

[CALM guide to exam stress](#)

[Mind guide to exam stress](#)

[Childline guide to exam stress and pressure](#)

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators MANAGING EXAM STRESS

At some point in their education, children are almost certain to encounter exam stress, which can cast a shadow over their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Mental health charity YoungMinds estimate that a staggering 87% of pupils suffer from exam stress – highlighting the urgent need to minimise its impact on children's health and happiness.

1 PRACTISE WORKLOAD WISDOM

The build up to exam season is such a busy and pressurised time in a child's education that it can be difficult for youngsters to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Encourage them to consider whether their current workload is realistic and allows them sufficient time to relax and recharge. Work with them in crafting a revision timetable that's manageable and includes breaks and occasional days off.

2 ADVISE CLEARING THE CLUTTER

A disorganised work environment is proven to negatively affect our ability to focus, as well as our emotional state. Encourage children to keep their desk, notes and revision materials tidy – creating a dedicated, well-kept study space to promote maximum focus. Foster their creativity by suggesting they incorporate vibrant colours, mind maps and even quirky drawings into their revision notes.

3 MASTER THE MATERIALS TOGETHER

Revision seems far harder when a child is uncertain where to begin or what sources to consult. Support them in confirming revision materials with their various teachers – emphasising the importance of gathering a range of resources to get a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Feeling more prepared should nurture the child's confidence and help to dispel some of their anxiety.

4 RECOMMEND CREATIVE NOTE-TAKING

Writing out notes in full – rather than simply bullet pointing – can be a strong start to a child's revision. Reinforce this idea, encouraging the use of flashcards (featuring shorter versions of previously taken notes) for effective repetition and memorisation. Discuss the power of regularly reviewing notes to help them stay in the child's memory.

5 USE VISUAL AIDS AND MNEMONICS

Encourage the use of visual aids like videos and sticky notes to enhance learning. Some children find these resources far more useful than simply reading their notes as written. Explore creating mnemonics for a fun and effective study approach – and it's also worth noting that the strategic use of colours is a proven means of triggering recall during exams.

SMILE

6 GATHER A 'TECH TOOLKIT'

Technology can be a huge advantage in exam prep. Educational YouTube channels and revision websites like BBC Bitesize can be immensely powerful resources for helping children to expand and retain their knowledge. You could also recommend the use of flashcard apps and educational podcasts for revision and reminders when young people are on the go.

7 KEEP IT FUN

Revision tends to go far more smoothly if children are having fun in the process. Injecting some humour into their notes, for instance, can make details more memorable – as can relating information to their real-life experiences. Try to encourage a variety of study methods, such as incorporating physical activity (even simply taking a walk) into their revision routine.

8 SUGGEST ACTIVE REVISION STRATEGIES

Make sure children are aware of different study techniques. You could emphasise the effectiveness of spaced repetition by reviewing material regularly over time to reinforce learning and improve retention. Discuss the benefits of active recall methods – such as self-testing or explaining a concept aloud – in identifying where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

9 ENCOURAGE A POSITIVE MINDSET

It can be easy for children's thoughts to fall into a downward spiral when they're stressed about exams. Try to foster a growth mindset by emphasising the importance of giving it their all rather than aiming for complete perfection. Positive self-talk and the use of affirmations can build confidence and reduce anxiety, while visualising success and setting realistic goals can help them stay motivated and focused.

10 HELP THEM TO SEIZE THE DAY

There are lots of things children can do on the day of their exam to reduce stress and increase their focus. Talk them through some helpful exam-day strategies – such as arriving early, reading the instructions and the questions carefully, and pacing themselves during the test. Suggest some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or visualisation, to help them manage any nerves before and during the exam.

Meet Our Expert

Minds Ahead design and deliver the UK's only specialist postgraduate mental health qualifications. Winner of the Social Enterprise UK: 'One to Watch' award, the charity provides training and support to education organisations and local authorities. This guide has been written by Adam Gillett – a learning and development specialist who is also Associate Vice-Principal for Personal Development at Penistone Grammar School.



#WakeUpWednesday

The National College