

# INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator

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## Helping your teenager win the 'Exam Game'

Examinations can mean testing times for parents and students. It doesn't have to be so hard. Here's an approach that will help ease pressure on students and maximise chances of success as well.



### Article contributed by Dr. Jason Fox

There are few things more frustrating for parents (and teachers) than seeing a bright, hardworking student crumble during assessments and exams. While in some cases this may happen because of a lack of effort, most students genuinely want to do well.

An exam is a very artificial situation that needs to be approached in a specific way to maximise success. One way of framing exams to help moderate the very serious pressure many students feel about exams is to see them as a game – just a game, and a great opportunity to show off their learning.

There are three phases in the exam game – **learning**, **revising** and **applying**. If you want to help someone lift their game, or get their head into the game, it helps to know what the game is. Here are a few thoughts for each phase:

#### Learning it

In the learning phase, students are still encountering new information, and they've still got processing to do. Here, the focus is on understanding. You can help your teenager by letting them teach you what they have learnt each day. By giving them the opportunity to do this, they play the empowering role of being 'teacher' for a change. They also get practiced at communicating and applying their knowledge in new ways.

The trap here is that you may want to correct them on things, or to show off your own expertise. Instead, focus on celebrating what they do know. **Be curious, not controlling.**

#### Revising it

Here's where it's important to ask your teenager how you can best help them revise. Do they need a quiet space at certain times each day? If they're lucky enough to have dinner cooked for them, could it help to have dinner served earlier? Can you help them host productive group study sessions?

Work with them, and give them the power and responsibility to craft the parameters that'll enhance their own performance.

The single most effective technique for mastering exams is to help your teenager do a lot of them. The more exams student have practice with, the more feedback they get for their revision, and the more they can focus on what they need to learn.

Purchase copies of practice exams and then help them establish an exam-like environment to do them in. Their ability to recall information is significantly enhanced when they learn in an environment that closely resembles the environment they learned it in. If they learn and revise in exam-like conditions they'll be more likely to recall information in exams. When students take practice exams in exam conditions, they sharpen their ability to apply what they know, rather than simply study things. It also helps them to refine and focus their revision programme early.

#### Applying it

There are many factors in the 24 hours before every exam that influence exam performance. Here's an important factor: **state management**. You want your teenager to be 100% primed before any exam, which means you'll want to be very focussed on positive reinforcement. You want them to feel confident and capable – not dreading what may happen if they 'fail'. Help them to demystify the exam experience. Emphasise the opportunity inherent within exams, but remind them that exams are, ultimately, just a small part of a bigger game. In the universities I have lectured at, I would urge my students to encourage other students prior to sitting their exams, to embody the role of 'positive uplifter' before their exams. Not everyone would, of course, but those who did would not only make others feel better (by offering words of encouragement or by sharing a joke to elevate the mood) – they'd also feel better and more confident themselves. This sure beats students comparing how stressed they are!

Ultimately, the best way for teenagers to enter exams in the most positive state is to have their learning validated through a **solid revision strategy** and a diet of **practice exams, low GI foods, plenty of sleep and a healthy sense of humour.**

And don't forget to remind them how proud you are to see them get this far.

#### Parentingideas Exam Expert

*Dr. Jason Fox is a multi-award winning international speaker who has helped thousands of students master the academic game. You can learn more about Jason at [www.drjasonfox.com](http://www.drjasonfox.com) and [www.enjoyexams.com](http://www.enjoyexams.com)*

Michael Grose Presentations  
PO Box 167 Balmarrig Vic 3926  
p + 61 3 5983 1798  
f (03) 5983 1722  
e [office@parentingideas.com.au](mailto:office@parentingideas.com.au)

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