

How to avoid annoying your kids and getting 'stressed by proxy' during exam season

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I knew assessment season was upon us when my son frantically asked me one morning before school if I had any spare pens in my bag. Despite the fact most tests have moved online, it appears the fear of ink in a pen

running out remains a timeless stress factor.

This will likely be a familiar scenario. With NAPLAN moving to March and Year 11 and 12 students already in the throes of multiple assessments, exams are looming for many households with [school-aged children](#).

This is likely to be stressful for parents as well as students, as families cope with pre-test anxieties and perhaps, different approaches to study and learning.

Exams are not the most important thing in life or in school. There is a [valid ongoing debate](#) among education researchers about the use of standardized testing. This comes on top of a welcome shift towards [developing lifelong creative learners](#), rather than kids who focus on tests.

In the meantime, how can we help our [children](#) manage this testing time?

Kids will likely do things their way

As parents, it is important to be aware of how your own school experiences may impact how you respond to your children sitting exams and preparing for them.

Perhaps studying came easily to you or it was very important to your identity growing up. Perhaps you have regrets about your involvement or engagement (or lack thereof) in school. Your natural instinct may be to try too hard to ensure your child does not replicate that experience.

Additionally we all have different ways of studying or revising information. Multiple [systematic reviews](#) have debunked the notion of "preferred learning styles" or the idea that students prefer learning through seeing, listening, or physically engaging with a subject. But

children may still approach learning differently to us. So we need to ensure our support is tailored to their needs, rather than our preferences.

How to really annoy your kids

In a recent [TEDx talk](#) I gave on the teenage brain and testing, I noted that, in my experience, one question annoys children more than any other:

"Why aren't you studying?"

Interestingly, the word "assessment" can act as a great guiding point for parents wanting to help their children during tests and exams. The word "assess" in Latin is the combination of two words meaning "to sit by or sit beside".

How to 'sit by' your children

When it comes to assessment time, instead of getting what I call "stressed by proxy", it's important to remain calm because your child will take your cues from you. Some steps to help your child during this time include:

1. Leave them alone after school

When they get home, give them some much needed decompression time, rather than diving straight into study. We know students manage multiple transitions and interactions during the day.

Just as adults need breathing space when they get home from work, so do [young people](#). Even half an hour will help.

2. Have supplies ready

Years of experience have taught me that for some reason, a black pen and a lead pencil are like gold in my household. I have no [scientific explanation](#) for the nebula they continually disappear into, but I have a secret stash to be proffered when needed.

I also have a spare charger and highlighter pens because they also become hot button items ahead of exams.

3. This includes snacks and water

A good way to help rather than impose yourself on your kids is to bring them snacks and water first before starting a conversation. Kids will often be hungry, tired and overwhelmed at the end of a long day at [school](#). When we meet this simple need, it is often a great basis for a deeper chat.

4. Show them you love them anyway

Finally, it's important to make it clear to young people that assessments are the equivalent of a [Snapchat streak](#). They capture a brief moment in time and that is all.

Maintaining [close and loving connections](#) with our kids during these times of stress is far more important for their longer term well-being.

A great measure of success is children being able to disclose their results with us, knowing they are emotionally safe to do so. Sometimes that may mean putting on our best poker face, or taking some very deep silent breaths.

Either way, it's important we remain a safe space that is available any time they need.

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