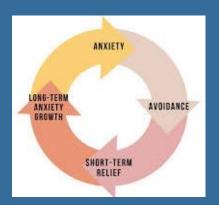
RPCC REGENTS PARK Community College APRIL 2024 RPCC COUNSELLOR'S MENTAL HEALTHUPDATES

EXAM ANXIETY

With GCSEs looming on the horizon, I thought it might be useful to highlight the pressures that our Year 11 students are facing at the moment. It can be incredibly frustrating to see our young people stressed and feel like we're not able to support them so below are a few tips.

AVOIDING THE ANXIETY

Anxiety and stress are commonly linked to how students feel leading up to exams and coursework deadlines and when it all gets too much, a typical coping mechanism can be to switch off and ignore it. However, this in turn can lead to more intense anxiety. The diagram shows how avoiding the very thing that we're anxious about, can lead to short-term relief but, over time will develop into a greater feeling of anxiety. This in turn, leads to a greater need for avoidance and so a cycle is formed.



This anxiety cycle diagram is a great way to demonstrate how avoidance can be detrimental to worries that we have and exam stress is no exception.

One of the discussions that I have with the Year 11 students at the moment, is the need to take the huge mountain of revision that they're trying to concentrate on and push it all to one side. It can be too much, and the student will often talk about how they don't even know where to start. The student can then choose a topic for the week, for example: English, and we will then discuss what work they would like to concentrate on for their chosen subject.

Using a revision timetable, (an example of this is shown below) can help students decide on days and times that best suit them, preferably in small, manageable chunks. The key to this task is ensuring that the workload is feasible.

At the end of the week, the student can then see the revision that they have managed to achieve, and this will not only eliminate anxiety, as they have a sense of achievement, but it will also give them the confidence to be able to do the same for the following week. Sometimes it isn't possible to take giant leaps through the revision process, but as long as they are taking small steps, they are still moving in the right direction. When confidence increases and anxiety decreases, those small steps will get bigger.

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SELF-CARE & SLEEP

Another topic that we're discussing in the counselling room in the lead up to exams is self-care.

There is a theory that says we should be able to roughly divide our day into 3 parts: 8 hours of sleep, 8 hours of work and 8 hours of self-care. I imagine I'm not alone with the shock of supposedly being able to spend 8 hours a day on self-care but how many of us

even allow 1 hour for this - 1 hour to do an activity that we enjoy that helps with our personal well-being? This doesn't mean spending an extra hour in bed at the weekend scrolling through our phones! It needs to be a mindful activity that we are doing for the purpose of 'time-out'.

Connecting with friends and family can be a really simple example of this, as is ensuring fresh air on a daily basis. Factoring these activities into our daily routines and taking some time out, can be really beneficial in the lead up to exam stress.

For some, 8 hours of sleep can also sound like an unrealistic request, however, getting an early night, especially the night before an exam, really can make all the difference. Verywellhealth.com suggests that a 16 year old needs between 8-10 hours sleep per night in order to function properly. I have included a poster that is on display in the counselling room, highlighting the dos and don'ts for a good night sleep.



The build-up to GCSEs can be a stressful time for students and their families. Trying to encourage your children to schedule self-care time in between revision, not only helps them to feel calm, but research has shown that it also helps to consolidate the knowledge and information that they are taking in.

Best of luck Year 11s. We're all here for you!

Carolyn Humby School Counsellor