

Exams - a guide for parents

Why might exams and revision be difficult for my child?

Many autistic pupils and students are academically able, but have difficulties with exams because they:

- feel anxious, exams can be a new and unpredictable experience
- lack the motivation to sit an exam. Your child might not understand why they need to sit an exam. They know that they have the knowledge and to take an exam seems pointless
- have a literal understanding that affects how they answer a question
- have sensory differences. The size and unfamiliarity of exam halls, plus things such as strip lighting, noise, smells, an invigilator walking around the hall can all be distracting or even overwhelming
- have difficulty staying focused.

What can I do to help?

Motivation

Try to explain how exams can help, for example, having qualifications can show employers that your child has knowledge of, and is good at certain subjects.

Revision

Encourage your child to think about what works for them, makes them feel most comfortable and able to absorb information. This could include:

- their ideal time of day to study
- what environment they work best in
- whether to study alone or with a friend
- which strategies can help (eg visual supports, memory aids).

There are many ways for young people to study for exams, including revision clubs, school libraries, practice exam papers, revision guides and software for computers and tablets.

Some students find that mind maps or flashcards help with their revision or they may prefer to use study apps.

Creating a revision timetable can be provide structure and help your child to prioritise which subjects to revise and when. It's important to include time for exercise, meals and drinks in a revision timetable, these can help them to remain positive and relieve anxiety or stress.

Preparing for exams

- Talk to your child about when exams will take place and how to prepare for them.
- Try to teach your child simple relaxation techniques.
- Ask teaching staff to remind your child to use these techniques before exams.
- Encourage your child to leave items relating to their intense interests at home.
- Suggest to your child that they do whatever helps them relax before leaving for an exam, this could be listening to if music or other forms of sensory input.
- Encourage your child to take part in physical activity as this can reduce anxiety.
- If you can, make sure your child eats well before an exam.
- Make yourself available to offer support during exam times.
- Display your child's exam timetable somewhere visible.
- Consider writing your child a social story about exams.

Social stories that could help your child

Here are example social stories that you could use to explain what exams are and what they need to do during an exam.

All about exams

Sometimes teachers give tests or exams to see what pupils have learnt in lessons. You can be given a test or an exam in any subject you study at school. When a teacher tells the class they have a test or an exam they often tell pupils what information will be covered. It is helpful to listen to what the teacher says and do some revision. Sometimes pupils feel nervous before or during an exam. It is OK to feel nervous.

During an exam

Sometimes teachers give tests or exams for pupils to complete. During exams, it's important to try and think about the questions and how to answer them. That way pupils can do their best in exams. Later, when the exam is finished, pupils and students may want to think about their intense interests. It is OK to think about these after the exam. I will try to think about exam questions and answers only during the exam.

Special arrangements for autistic young people during exams

Schools can make their own arrangements for autistic pupils and students during internal exams. For public or external national exams, they must apply for special arrangements to be put in place. These can also be called access or assessment arrangements.

Schools have to demonstrate that special arrangements are needed. For example, pupils and students may first have been tested by a specialist teacher or an educational psychologist to determine which arrangements are appropriate.

The special arrangements they can ask for include:

- extra time
- a separate room either in a small group or alone
- a reader

- a scribe
- a prompter to keep students focused
- an oral language modifier (except Scotland)
- a computer instead of handwriting
- assistive software (screen reader/voice recognition)
- exam papers in different formats, such as digital
- supervised rest breaks.

These arrangements may be offered to students with special educational needs or additional support needs, including students who are autistic. They must be requested in advance from exam boards or awarding bodies and there are often deadlines involved.

Schools can apply for special arrangements to be made with evidence of a pupil or student's needs and if an application is refused, they can appeal against it.

If you're a parent with concerns about your child as their exams approach, talk to school staff about applying for special arrangements.

Further help from our charity

Our [Education Rights Helpline](#) can provide information, support and advice on educational provision and entitlements for autistic children and young people.

Visit our [online community](#).

Read our pages on [anxiety](#)

Read our pages on [Social Stories](#)

Useful resources

[BBC Bitesize](#) learning resources for young people, teachers and parents.

[Brain in hand](#) autism support app.

[MyStudyLife](#) free study app.

[Get revising](#) revision tools.

[The Student Room](#) online student community.