



What now?

Waiting for exam results is a worrying time for teens, says **Janey Downshire**

June can be a stressful month for any parent who has had a child facing exams. Some families are facing any combination of Common Entrance, GCSEs, AS, A levels, university exams or Finals. Parents may need to tread carefully in order not to upset the apple cart. Alternatively, you might have been tearing your hair out because your teenager has cruised through their exams when you actually wished that their foot WAS on the accelerator. Then within a second, it's all over.

Some may be elated and pleased with their achievements, others angry and disappointed by how they have performed.

As the summer progresses, exams, and the new chapters they open, can be a useful opportunity to ponder on the wider picture. Exams are milestones, which mark life's journey and represent a significant hurdle, which all children have to overcome. How your child gets through this time is an education in itself, because a teenager develops a pattern or way of being, and this is how they will respond to life's future challenges.

Parents are role models and how they react and respond to life's crises are crucial at this time. From now until results are known,

parents can help to manage expectations and help their child practise the vital life skill of resilience - bouncing back from life's ups and downs, being realistic about what the future holds and being willing to change tack should circumstances require it.

Early warning signals for parents that your child is not 100% and might be suffering undue stress include:

- Negative or obsessive thinking (for example

familiar reluctance to discuss the exams.

- Avoidant behaviour (camouflaging emotions) an overly inflated opinion of performance masking fear of shame or pride.
- No energy/enthusiasm/slumped in front of TV - I don't care attitude which masks a real fear of failure.
- Increased time spent with friends drinking/smoking/drug taking/computer games - avoidance/ masking the pain of reality.

Tempting though it may be, parents should avoid:

- Grilling your child about the exams. There is a fine balance between wondering whether a contingency plan is required, versus making your child feel even worse.
- Crying over spilt milk - if it has gone wrong, parents need to demonstrate resilience to their child and to not have an emotional meltdown themselves.
- Shutting the door after the horse has bolted - now is not

TIPS to help your child

- All behaviour MASKS underlying emotional need. Try to respond to feelings not behaviour, (eg. Sulky, aggressive child may be FEELING uncertain, frightened, angry). Acknowledging emotion helps child to defuse them.
- Don't raise the issue of results unless your child does: see yourself as stepping back from micro-management and re-defining yourself as someone who your child CHOOSES to turn to for guidance, reassurance and discussion

about THEIR options.

- If your child is worried that they have done badly, help them think through the implications and (hopefully) realise there is still hope.

- Help them face the fear of failure by talking casually about times in your own life when things did not go well so that they can put "failure" into perspective.

- Help your child to set realistic goals. Ask THEM what they think the outcome is likely to be just after their exams, as

this is likely to result in lower predictions. You can then remind them when they outperform. Setting unrealistic, un-achievable goals is a habit, which ensures failure and low self-esteem.

- Talk through the alternatives. Have a light-hearted discussion to discuss all the options/choices available. In the aftermath of exam disappointment, you can remind your child of any pursuable alternatives, should a change of direction be required.

a genuine belief that they have failed or under-performed using language like "never", "always" "failed" "useless".

- Un-shifting mood swings including pessimistic, depressed, unnecessarily snappy, tearful or aggressive.
- Non-communicative (monosyllabic/unfa-

the time to remind your child how little work they did BEFORE the exams...

- Showing your disappointment - this is your child's journey, not yours.
- Sharing the turmoil with your friends. ✍️

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