

TASSOMAI



GCSE Survival Guide
Practical advice for parents

Welcome to Tassomai's GCSE Survival Guide

As a first 'national exam' a child will have experienced, GCSEs are of course a major milestone in the academic life of any child. But GCSEs can also be a very challenging time for parents, particularly when your first child is going through them and you're both unsure of what to expect.

This guide has been put together by the team at Tassomai with the help of subject specialists, education experts and mental health campaigners to try to break down what you as parents need to know about the next 2-3 years of your child's education. Our contributors have given us their top tips on everything from relaxation strategies to revision techniques in the hope that they can put your minds at ease.

The biggest issue that students face in the current system is getting all of the content covered in time, both in class and then again in their revision time. Technically, GCSEs only last for 2 years but a lot of schools are adjusting this so that the courses span nearly 3 or even 5 years to make sure everything is covered sufficiently.

The most significant change that will have taken place since parents sat their own exams, is that all coursework has now been replaced with high-stakes terminal exams at the end of year 11. While in the past, coursework might have been included in final grades taking some of the pressure off the year 11 assessments, now in most subjects everything rides on the performance in the exam on the day. Although this can sound daunting, there's a lot you and your child can do to make this process easier on you both.

After several years of disrupted learning, some students may have never sat an exam before, which could lead to them being even more stressed than usual for their GCSEs. Looking after your child's wellbeing and breaking down any concerns they have about assessments is key to their success in their GCSEs and beyond.

We hope the following pages can equip you with the knowledge and confidence you need to help your child not only survive but thrive during their GCSE years.

Murray Morrison
Tassomai founder
@MurrayTassomai



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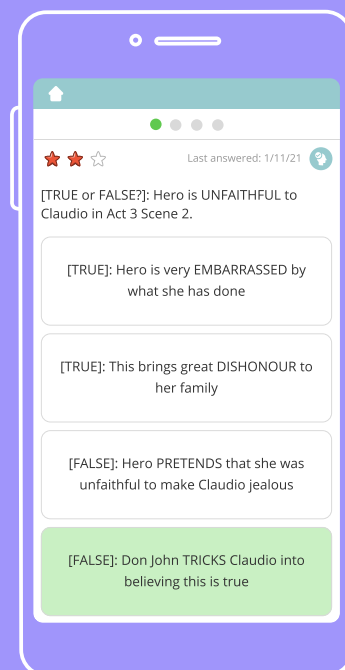
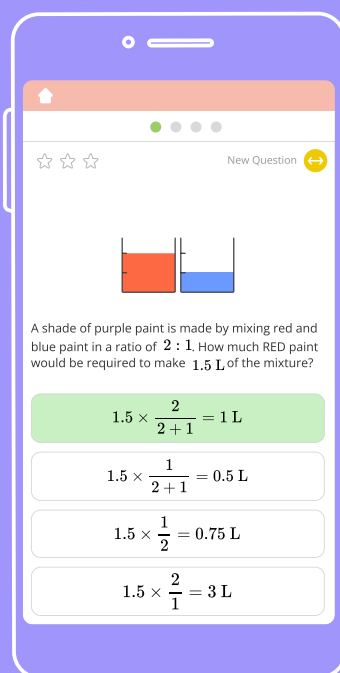
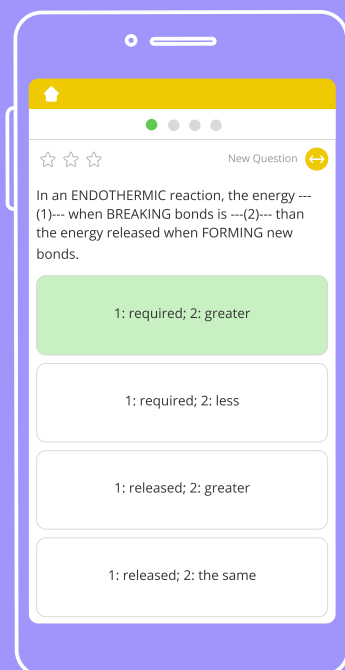
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About Tassomai

Tackling the Core GCSE Subjects





GCSE English: What to Expect

All of our English specialists agree that students are often unsure about how to revise for their English assessments. Coursework is no longer part of the English GCSEs, so the pressure on students to do well in the exam can make revising feel overwhelming - especially if it's all done at the last minute!

With multiple texts to study and memorise quotes for, it's not hard to see why students may feel intimidated by the task ahead of them. English expert Andy Sammons advises students to ***"break subjects down into their component parts as this makes them much more approachable, even if it's a subject that your child doesn't personally like. It's all about identifying what you need to know."***



What do you need to know?

- **The Syllabus**

A good starting point for both parents and students is to get to know the syllabus of the exam board they are studying. This information is easily available online and it's a good guide for knowing where they will pick up marks on each paper.

- **The Content**

They will be sitting two separate papers as part of their English GCSE: one in language and one in literature, both will require students to read and analyse extracts of text, so this is something you can help them to practise at home. The English literature exams will cover: a Shakespeare play, a 19th century text, a modern text, an anthology of poetry and a piece of unseen poetry. Parents can help with quizzing their children on the plot, characters, themes and settings of these texts, as well as asking them to explain why certain techniques are used (this will help them to pick up extra marks).

- **The Dates**

It's a good idea to make note of any assessment dates in line with your timetable too, to make sure they don't sneak up on you. Abi Ludlow, English teacher and Head of KS3, encourages parents to ***"work backwards from the exams and plan when revision needs to take place - this way they are more likely to achieve a good work-life balance and not feel overwhelmed by the task ahead of them."***

GCSE English: Supporting Your Child

For both English literature and language, our English specialists all recognise that it is important for students to read as much as possible. Reading and analysing both nonfiction and fiction texts is essential practice for the exams and something that can easily be done at home with parents.

Kathrine Mortimore, English teacher at Torquay Academy, advises that revising for the GCSE English literature exam is ***“not all about memorising quotations - it’s also about knowing how to use these quotes to illustrate a point.”*** She also emphasises the importance of contextualising students’ knowledge, to build ***“that background knowledge of the genres that we know they’re going to need at GCSE.”*** This is essential for showing a wider and more sophisticated understanding of the texts in an exam, which is key to obtaining a good mark.



Practical Tips

As well as typical revision practices such as flashcards and past papers, when it comes to revising for the exam, Abi Ludlow also recommends doing a ***“30 minute writing challenge: give your child a Unit 2 task and starting a 30 minute timer. Aim for a detailed plan and at least one side of writing!”*** Parents can help their children to revise for English by mixing up these more formal practices with short quizzes and engaging conversations about what they’re studying.

For Andy Sammons ***“it’s all about getting match ready”*** when it comes to GCSE exams. ***“If they know the content of the texts they’ve studied and they know the structure of the papers inside out, then they’re perfectly set up for being able to apply the knowledge of the former to the latter - it’s all about getting a good understanding of both textual and procedural knowledge.”***



Find out how
Tassomai helps with
English literature
& **English language**
revision today!

GCSE Science: What to Expect

Like other GCSEs, science has changed over the past few years to exclude coursework, which means everything is saved for the end of year exams and there is a lot of content to cover. Year 9 acts as a foundation year where students get a good grip of the core concepts that will be the building blocks for their learning over the next two years.



Kit Betts-Masters, science teacher and YouTuber behind 'Gorilla Physics', recommends that parents get to know what their child is studying and when: ***"every school now legally has to post its curriculum on its website with a year by year, term by term breakdown of what is being covered and when. Ofsted are checking that this information is displayed so it should definitely be available and is a great way for parents to stay informed and up to date."***

Being able to talk to your child about where they are in their GCSE science journey can help you to keep them engaged in their studies. This can also help you to catch any early warning signs that they are struggling.

All of our science experts agree that:

- 1. There is a lot of content to cover, which can be daunting**
- 2. The best thing to do in this situation is to plan ahead to avoid last minute cramming**
- 3. Avoid 'crunch points' by taking note of when key assessments like mock exams are taking place and planning ahead to spread out the workload as much as possible.**

Revision doesn't have to be intense from the very beginning, but it does help to get the ball rolling early.

Another important thing to consider with GCSE science is how you can help to build your child's confidence in their abilities. Kit says that ***"for me, the biggest challenge in science education is convincing people that it's okay to not understand every single thing."*** It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the subject at first and this is why it can help to remind your child what they actually enjoy about the subject, even when they are struggling.

GCSE Science: Supporting Your Child

Many other parents don't feel like they have the scientific knowledge to help their children with their science revision, and it can seem difficult to support them when your child's level has surpassed your own. You can always brush up on sites like BBC Bitesize if you want to keep up with them or find quizzes online that you can test them on.

Karen Collins explains that *"for all three sciences, there are basic facts and premises the students need to learn but the real challenge comes in the exams when they have to apply this knowledge to questions. There's one classic example where students had learnt about an experiment testing how different sugar solutions affect osmosis on slices of potato, and when students were instead asked about carrots in an exam they had no idea what to say."*



It's therefore important to ensure your child understands the content they are studying and isn't just regurgitating memorised facts. This is where using past papers can be useful as they help to test students' application of their knowledge and solve problems.



Overlapping Knowledge

Matt Green, 'The Rapping Science Teacher' on TikTok, says that topics often overlap in GCSE science and *"there are always students who struggle with some elements of physics and it is often because their confidence is also low in maths."*

Matt continues, *"The best way to build confidence is to start with the topics that you find hard to understand. It can be a really great motivator for a student to feel like they've mastered a topic that they have been told is the 'most difficult one on the course', because from that point on everything gets easier and slots into place."*

Kit Betts-Masters encourages parents to *"ban phrases like 'science isn't for me' or 'I don't get it' because that doesn't help anyone. Science is definitely seen as a trickier subject but I think it is also one of the most interesting and there's a route into it for every student."*

Science is all about asking questions: not necessarily knowing the answers, but seeking answers. So if you as a parent don't feel confident in your own science knowledge, don't let that stop you from helping your child to learn and practise.

Read more about
Tassomai's
impact on science
revision [here!](#)

GCSE Maths: What to Expect

As GCSE maths is an important subject for routes into further education, less confident students may need extra support to ensure that this progression takes place.



We spoke to maths expert Wendy Finan, who advises that *“progression routes for higher and further education should be investigated but unless a student is wanting to progress to maths, science or engineering qualifications a grade 4/5 is usually sufficient.”* So although parents may worry about what tier (foundation or higher) or what grade their child is able to obtain, there are always options that will allow for your child to progress. Wendy also told us that *“in 2019 almost 60% of UK students were being entered at foundation level”* and do very well with this level of paper instead of struggling and having their confidence knocked by the higher.

Laying the Foundation

Like our other GCSE specialists, Wendy supports getting started early when it comes to revision: *“the key to doing well in mocks and exams alike is consistency. By remaining consistent and being strong in the basics, they are much more likely to succeed both academically and emotionally.”*

Wendy also says that *“the key thing to getting the most out of GCSE maths is laying strong foundations - the basic core topics include number properties and calculation, ratio, fractions, decimals, percentages, and using negative numbers. If your child doesn't have a solid understanding of these ideas, then piling on the harder topics is simply not going to work.”* Therefore, when it comes to revising GCSE maths, sometimes it can be useful to pinpoint topics where your child is struggling and then return to revising the basics related to that area to fix any gaps in basic knowledge.

“Just like a Jenga tower, maths needs a solid foundation, otherwise everything laid on top will come crumbling down.”

GCSE Maths: Supporting Your Child

It's all too common for students, and parents for that matter, to say that they are 'bad at maths', however, Wendy Finan says that *"maths is largely about the mental attitude you have towards it."* Encouraging your child to have a positive approach to their maths work rather than dismissing the subject as soon as they start to struggle is key in helping them build their confidence in the subject.

When it comes to revising, it's important to remember that *"the new national curriculum has a huge emphasis on problem solving, meaning students need to understand how to apply maths like Pythagoras' theorem to situations and problems, rather than just grasping it as a concept,"* says our maths expert. To help students develop their problem solving skills, Wendy recommends puzzles such as Sudoku as a fun way to keep students engaged in their maths revision.

The Parent Becomes the Student

Another way to help your child test their GCSE maths knowledge is to get them to teach you what they have learnt. This means you don't need to be an expert in the subject to help them develop their maths skills - it's just keeping them engaged that's key!

Other suggested ways to get involved include:

- Offering positive encouragement and reassurance without putting too much pressure on your child
- Finding out how their performance is in school tests and mocks so you can set realistic expectations together
- Supporting them with additional quizzes and past papers at home

By keeping yourself up to date and engaged with your child's learning you can help them feel supported and confident during their GCSE exams. *"I would encourage all parents to keep communication channels open between school, student, and parent,"* says Wendy.

Remember that there are a range of factors that contribute to your child's GCSE outcomes. It's good to try to avoid feeling overly responsible for their success in this respect - and to remember to reach out to their school if you feel your child needs extra support!

Find out how
Tassomai
helps with
maths [here!](#)

Tassomai's NEW Subjects

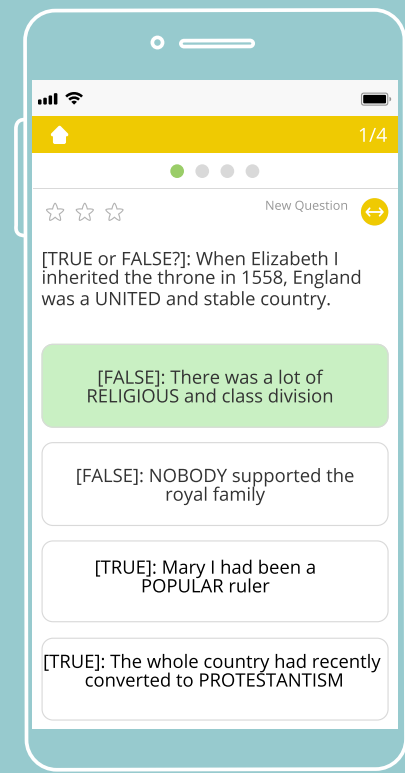
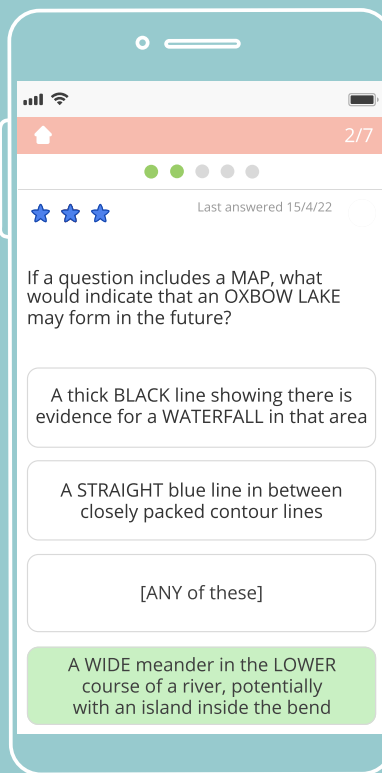
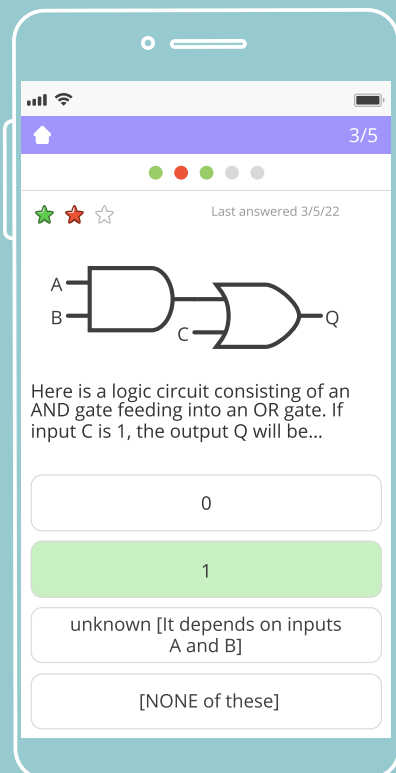


New Subjects for Tassomai

For the 2022/23 academic year, Tassomai is launching 3 new subjects: geography, history and computer science! These courses are currently going through a rigorous school trial and will be available to private subscribing parents in 2023.

In the meantime, we have spoken to a number of teachers and education experts about these new subjects, picking up lots of in-depth knowledge along the way. We hope these tips and tricks will help you to support your child in a range of subjects, even if you don't feel like you are personally an expert in the area.

To find out more about the subjects Tassomai offers for privately subscribing parents, [click here](#).



GCSE Geography: What to Expect

Geography is one of Tassomai's new subjects launching in 2022/23 so we have been working with teachers and experts to figure out exactly what parents and students need to know. Like many of your child's other subjects, geography has a lot of content to cover in a short space of time, so get your flashcards at the ready because some simple retrieval practice goes a long way in humanities subjects!

How is the GCSE structured?

If your child takes geography, they will have to sit 3 paper at the end of year 11, which broadly boil down into the following categories:

- **Physical geography** – covering topics like rivers, volcanoes, coastal erosion, geology and ecosystems
- **Human geography** – covering topics like urban growth, economic development and the demand for global resources like food and water
- **Geographical skills** – this used to be assessed through coursework but is now included in exam papers, testing students' cartographic, data and fieldwork skills



These topics are all spread out slightly differently depending on the exam board that your school uses but they all cover largely similar content and assess the same skillset. There will be a mixture of short 1-2 mark questions and longer 4-6 mark questions which require students to expand on their knowledge, as well as draw on case studies and real world examples.

Josh Tipping, former Head of Geography, recommends *“having a checklist at the start of the year of all the topics that need to be covered and ticking them off as your child covers them in class.”* Although he does add that *“some of the topics are chosen by the teacher out of a list of options, so make sure you know which ones your child is definitely covering so that they pick the right ones in their assessments!”*

GCSE Geography: Supporting Your Child

There's a lot that parents can be doing to help their child thrive in their geography studies, particularly as it's a subject that can be discussed in your day to day life. That doesn't mean you need to be rushing down to the beach next weekend to point out examples of coastal erosion, but talking about how the subject has a real world impact can help to keep students engaged with their studies.

How can parents be of most help?

We weren't joking about the flashcards! They're a trusty revision tool for a reason and are the perfect way for parents to test and embed their child's subject knowledge.

Josh Tipping's favourite piece of advice for parents is to get them to ask SO WHAT? *"I had this phrase written in big letters all around the classroom to remind students to expand their answers beyond just stating facts. It's all well and good to know that polar bears have white fur but if they don't then say 'because this helps them to camouflage against the white snow' then that knowledge won't help them to get the top marks."*

So get into conversation with your child about the topics they're studying and when it comes to revision make sure they know the why behind each of their factual statements so that they can push towards the higher marks.

Which areas require the most work?

Our geography experts all agree that there are a few key areas that students should pay attention to when they're learning and revising for geography:

- **Model answers for key 4 mark questions** – these will be questions like 'how does a meander form' or 'how does a volcano form' and they are easy ways to pick up marks if you pay them enough attention
- **Learning key facts about case studies** – even name dropping a case study can help towards higher grades so make sure your child has a good understanding to draw on when they need it
- **Get them to revise some basic maths** – averages, bar graphs and charts all make appearances in geography papers and it can be the difference between grades if your child can get them right

GCSE History: What to Expect

History is a new subject on Tassomai this year, but understandably topics have stayed largely the same since parents were studying it at school! It is a content-heavy subject that can be tricky to revise for but as long as they master their exam technique, there's no reason why your child can't succeed in their history GCSE.

How is the GCSE structured?

The history GCSE is broken down into:

- **One period study** – These look at long periods of time and the build up to historical events. A period study could look at, for example, how a country became communist over time
- **One thematic study** – This topic spans the longest time period and looks at how things have evolved over time. Your child may therefore study something like the history of medicine from the mediaeval era to the present day
- **One wider-world or modern depth study** – Depth studies cover slightly shorter time frames, like WWI
- **One British depth study** – These studies are again of a shorter time frame but are specific to British history and will cover a topic like the Elizabethan or Restoration era

Each exam board structures their content slightly differently and they don't all cover the same topics but the skills they are assessing are largely the same. As long as your child builds a strong knowledge foundation and practises how to apply that learning to suit the exam criteria, they should be able to thrive in their history GCSE.

Getting Started

Kier Smith, Teacher of History at a school in Bristol, told the Tassomai team that ***"GCSE history is a massive step up from KS3 history. Students are required to understand the links between different events and how timelines all work together."***

He warns that for the first half-term students can feel overwhelmed with the sheer amount of knowledge they're expected to learn, ***"but don't worry, you soon get to grips with it and will be flying by Christmas."***

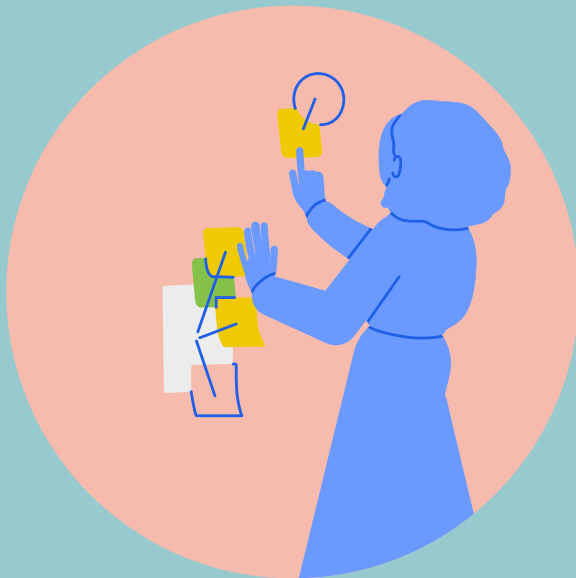


GCSE History: Supporting Your Child

How can parents help?

The easiest way for parents to help their child to revise for their history GCSEs is to make sure they have a really solid understanding of the different timelines they are studying. Keir suggests: *"encourage students to make flashcards that you can use to test them at home. Once they have some key facts really embedded then you can start breaking down exam questions with them and thinking about how they would answer questions."*

History can be a challenge for students who don't feel confident in their essay writing skills, so practising structuring and writing these longer answers can be a real help when it comes to the exams.



It's All About the Connections

The best way to aim for the higher marks in history papers is to make sure your child understands the links between the different topics they've covered, whether that's recognising that two events took place in the same time period and what that means or noting similarities in the treatment of people from a certain social class over time.

Keir's favourite method is *"to get a student to write down everything they know about a topic or time period on a bit sheet of paper, spreading out each piece of information, and then ask them to draw lines between each fact and explain the connection between them. This really helps them to visualise the links between different events, which will push them up the marking criteria in exams."*

He also recommends exposing students to a wide range of external reading by taking them to the local library and encouraging them to read around their topics. Engaging with the subject and really being able to visualise what was happening in different time periods is key to keeping them focused, while also bringing the subject to life. History should be an interesting and enjoyable subject after all!

GCSE Computer Science: What to Expect

For many parents, computer science may be a completely new subject, whereas others may assume it is the same as computing or ICT. Even if you're terrified of technology, there's no reason to fear trying to help your child with this subject. There are lots of ways to break it down, just like any other topic, and help them revise for their exams without being an expert.

What is Computer Science?

Computer science is a relatively new subject to the GCSE curriculum and combines elements of computing with further maths topics. Don't let the mention of further maths put your child off though – the mathematical element is very accessibly presented and easy to visualise so students don't even realise how complicated the topics they are covering really are! This means it can be a great way of showing them how useful mathematical skills can be in the 'real world', while also helping them along the way if they choose maths or further maths for A-level.



Holly Billingham, private tutor at [TeachAllAboutIt](#) and former computer science teacher, says that ***"the sentence I have to repeat most with new students is that 'computer science is not gaming'! It's not an easy cop-out subject but it is very interesting and will teach you a range of new skills that could lead to future subjects, coding languages and even careers."***

How is the GCSE structured?

No matter which exam board your child is taking their exams with, they will have 2 papers to sit at the end of the year:

One on theory and practical programming – this includes learning either a 'pseudo code' or a reference language, which will get them used to the basics of coding and set them up to learn more about them in the future if they wish

The second paper is the mathematical unit – this includes learning about how computers create letters, images and sound, as well as topics on the hardware of computers and the ethical and legal aspects of working with computers

GCSE Computer Science: Supporting Your Child

Like most other subjects, computer science is just about learning new information and then understanding how it all fits together. So the advice in the rest of this guide all still applies and there are plenty of ways to get involved in their studies, even if you aren't a natural tech wizard yourself.

Holly's main piece of advice to parents is: *"Don't tell your child that you hate computers! This may not seem too significant, but students look to their parents to see whether they think they can achieve something, no matter how subconscious this may be. So try to be as encouraging as you can around the subject (even when frazzled by technology at the end of a long day)."*

Learning the Language of Revision

It's best to treat computer science like any other revision: make sure your child is practising and engaging with the subject regularly and have access to any resources they might need. This doesn't mean they need the latest MacBook, though access to a computer outside of school hours is a massive help, as there are plenty of ways of keeping up a little-and-often revision approach throughout the year, providing they are consistent with it.

"Coding languages' are the series of written instructions that computers read and translate into action, and the best way to learn them, just like any other language, is to expose yourself to them as much as possible." Holly continues, *"if your child turned up to their Spanish oral exam without having practised any Spanish all year, understandably, they probably wouldn't do their best, and the same goes for computer science. It's important that they become familiar with the code they'll use for their exams as early on as possible."*

It is also good to remember that you should never be afraid to ask schools for help. Many computer science classes are taught by non-specialist teachers but they will still be able to point you towards lots of resources online and offer additional help.





How to Support your Child's Wellbeing & Mental Health

How Can Parents Support Their Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Throughout GCSEs?

The GCSE years are some of the most difficult and frustrating that young people go through. Academic success can easily become the centre of attention during this period, even when there is so much else going on, but it is crucial that this pressure isn't allowed to overshadow your child's physical and emotional wellbeing.

It's time we broke down some of the myths surrounding GCSEs and that starts with thinking about the stress that is often associated with the assessments. It can be easy to forget that these exams are probably one of your child's first encounters with this kind of stress. People who are already struggling with any other aspect of their life, be that with their family, friends, with illness or financial worries, find the struggle even harder.

Understandably, this must be a very scary time for parents not knowing how best they can help. Keeping a level head and reasonable expectations as a parent during this time is much more likely to have a better impact on your child than pushing as hard as you can for top grades. All parents want their children to succeed - it's all just about keeping a healthy balance.

We have spoken to psychotherapy experts and mental health campaigners to put together their top tips on how parents can best support their children's mental wellbeing throughout their GCSEs, some are good reminders of age-old sayings and others bring a fresh perspective, either way we hope they help your family to conquer GCSEs with confidence and understanding.



What's Really Happening When We Are Stressed?

The best way to minimise stress and anxiety for students is to understand what it is and how we can combat it. Everyone has experienced some form of stress in their lives, but how often do we stop to analyse its symptoms and its effect on the body? Understanding and being prepared for the physical and emotional signs of stress can stop students from getting overwhelmed in new situations. It really does all come down to a bit of basic biology...



"Many students show physical signs of stress right before assessments as their fight or flight response kicks in with their adrenaline - their hands might shake, their heart might be beating faster. By understanding what is happening biologically, you are better equipped to take yourself through some logistical steps or techniques to regain control and be able to focus in the assessment. Learning breathing exercises, meditating and practicing yoga can all help to calm these nerves and there are loads of YouTube videos students can watch and learn from." – Karen Collins, Lead Science Associate for PiXL

Neurological development of young adults

Teenagers are going through monumental changes in most aspects of their lives during the time when they're also expected to sit their GCSEs. With this in mind, knowing what is physically changing in your child's brain can be really illuminating for parents.



"Important changes are taking place during the teenage years. Hormonal changes and changes in different parts of the brain are prompting complete transformations in their lives before academic, family or social pressures even get a look-in. These changes are taking place in the limbic system, which is responsible for seeking pleasure and rewards, emotional responses and sleep, as well as in the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision making, organising, planning and controlling impulses. Knowing and recognising that these changes are going on makes you realise just how much neurological development is happening during these years and how unsettled teenage life really is." – Madeleine Inkin, psychotherapist and co-founder of Tassomai

Parental Expectations

Parental expectations can be a double-edged sword: you want to motivate them and help them succeed, but you may end up doing the opposite if you don't strike the right balance. Students are bombarded with information about assessments and revision throughout their time at school and it is easy to go along with this rhetoric without thinking about what is actually achievable and specific to your child's abilities.

That isn't to say that you can't encourage them to aim for higher grades, but keeping a healthy perspective on what they as an individual are academically capable of ensures that they will strive to perform to the best of their ability, rather than an arbitrary standard.

Here's what some of our specialists have to say about keeping a level approach:

"Parents have a tricky balancing act to perform, as over involvement can lead to additional pressure for students and sometimes unrealistic expectations, and under involvement can lead to students switching off and not performing as well as they could. As a parent you would aim for that goldilocks position where parents are encouraging, interested and supportive." – Wendy Finan, Senior Secondary Mathematics Teaching and Learning Consultant

"When parental expectations are not met and parents feel disappointed, developing children and teenagers will internalise a sense of themselves as being a disappointment, which will nurture low self-esteem and shame. When what is expected of them by the parent isn't within their ability, parental disappointment can be devastating. Be child led and be honest about their unique interests, talents, and temperament. Place your child at the centre of your parental observation and concern - this will inform you of any necessary parental expectations." – Madeleine Inkin, psychotherapist and co-founder of Tassomai



Read more from Madeleine Inkin about the teenage brain and parental expectations on the [Tassomai blog](#).

Practical Tips to Support Your Child

Do

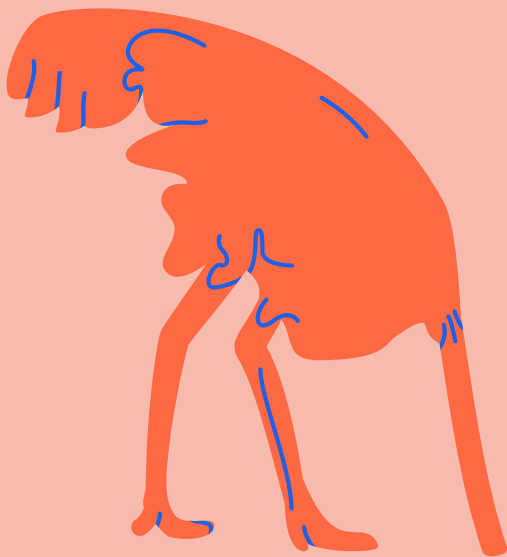
- **Start the conversation!** Ask them questions about how they're feeling. If they're not comfortable sharing, try opening up about any struggles you've faced in the past. Vulnerability is contagious!
- **Act early!** If you think they are struggling, don't sweep it under the rug. Even if you're not sure of the best way to help, it's always better to address any underlying issues or unhappiness as soon as it arises.
- **Educate yourself** on mental health and the best ways to support your child if they are struggling. [Young Minds](#) has great resources for parents and carers who want to feel a bit more informed.
- Work with your child to try and set up a sustainable routine around GCSE preparation, even if it's initially 15 minutes each day. The confidence-building power of daily routine is transformative and can **prevent performance stress** before it starts.

Don't

- Stop them from seeing friends during revision time, it's good to break up the work with healthy social situations and **everyone needs some downtime**.
- **Try to take everything on yourself** - it's really important to remind yourself that you are not a professional and there may come a time when your child needs more than just your personal support. This is very hard, especially for parents, as our natural instinct is always to try and 'rescue' someone we care about from situations that are hurting them, but we can't do everything ourselves, nor are we qualified to.
- **Allow stress to become sickness**. Intervene before your child has a chance to get overwhelmed - it's all too easy for everyday stress over GCSEs to tip into something more serious, so don't let a fixable situation get worse than it needs to.
- Let your child mistake a single test score for a **final assessment of their potential**. Instead encourage them to focus on how their work is developing, what they want to improve next, and on the positive incremental changes over time.

Is Your Child Suffering from Exam Stress? How to spot the Signs

Students preparing for exams often display very similar characteristics and it is good for parents to be aware of a few classic archetypes of exam-stressed children. Be sure to look out for the signs!



The Ostrich

The ostrich is that student who, at the mere mention of their exams - or their revision - buries their head in the sand. They could be quite obvious in this behaviour - "I don't want to talk about it" - or it might be subtler, finding an excuse to get out of the room and avoid the topic. Waste no time in confronting this behaviour and making a plan together, because the very act of avoidance means that the revision work will pile up and the stress will increase.

The Porcupine

Similar to the ostrich in many respects, but rather than avoid the conversation, the porcupine might become rather spikey and start shaking their quills. The reasons are quite similar, and the approach, likewise requires calm, careful conversation and a structured plan to work together to remove the fear of the exams.



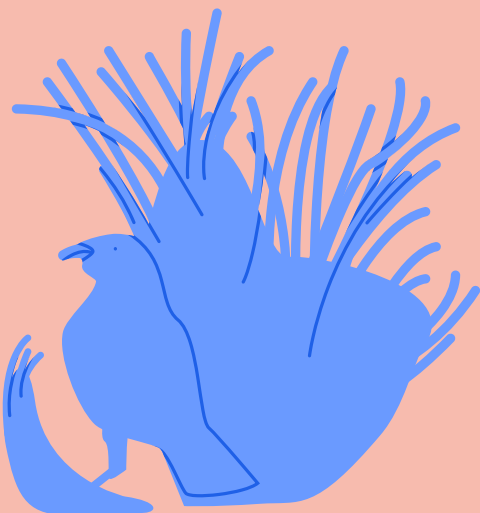


The Meerkat

You might think you've been fortunate if your child is the Meerkat: super busy, extremely diligent, revising late and requesting extra practice papers from the teacher. But this behaviour may indicate a lack of confidence and a tendency to worry. Talk to your child to make sure they're keeping things in perspective and limit the revision schedule in order to allow time for R&R.

The Lion

A tendency of higher-achievers - the Lion is that child who seems to have it all under control, but spending an inordinate amount of time lying around. If they're behaving as though the exams present no problems - to the point perhaps of arrogance or laziness - then it's time for a conversation. Are they hiding any anxiety and feeling like they can't ask for help, or don't know how to?



The Bower Bird

A classic behaviour, not unlike the Meerkat. The Bower Bird (who spends large parts of its life decorating its nest) lends its name nicely to the type of student who keeps themselves terribly busy focusing on superficial tasks like colouring in notes or organising files and revision plans. If you are the parent of a Bower Bird, then talk to them, constructively, about their aims for each revision session, and check in with them regularly to see how much they have achieved.

Mental Health Resources

[SHOUT85258](#)

SHOUT85258 is a text message based organisation that gives young people an accessible way of asking for help. Think of it as the texting version of the Samaritans. Even if your child isn't currently struggling, suggesting they save the number to their contacts will let them know that you're thinking of them, without smothering them.

[Samaritans](#)

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout Great Britain and Ireland, predominantly through their telephone helpline, which is available 24/7 for those who need it.

[Papyrus UK](#)

Papyrus UK is a mental health charity specialising in supporting young people and they have great advice for parents and carers, both on their website and if you contact them. The resources on their site are fantastic. If you are unsure where to start, head to their website.

[Young Minds](#)

Young Minds is the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health. As an organisation, they are fighting for a world where no young person feels alone with their mental health. They have a parents helpline and large bank of resources for parents who are unsure of how to best support their child's mental health.

[Switchboard](#)

Switchboard is a hotline, instant message and email service run by volunteers who all identify as LGBT+. They offer a safe space for anyone to discuss sexuality, gender identity, sexual health and emotional well-being.



"People don't compare mental health to their physical health enough - if you were concerned for your child's physical health you would be straight down to your GP asking for a check up and making sure everything was ok. You wouldn't leave an infection to 'clear up by itself', you would act, and the same has to go for mental health. Act early if you notice someone struggling." – Ben West, mental health campaigner

Read Ben West's top tips for supporting your child's mental health during GCSEs on the [Tassomai blog](#).



Our Experts' Top Revision Tips

The Science of Learning

With a multitude of resources to aid studying available on the internet, it can be hard to know where to start. Our Science expert Kit Betts-Masters has shared some research with us on the science of learning, and how students can use this research to optimise their time spent studying.

Kit says that *“the evidence suggests that students prefer making notes and highlighting texts as their main method of revision - but the evidence also shows that this is the least effective way to revise!”* Instead of staring at revision notes, which don't engage students' brains on an intensive level, Kit recommends revision that is more linked to retrieval practice.

Retrieval practice works because *“every single time you try to retrieve a fact, even if you don't get it right the first time, you code that bit of information deeper and deeper into your long term memory.”* This is of course an important practice for the exam - we all know how hard it can be to remember facts under pressure.

10 minutes of intensive quizzing > staring at a notebook for an hour

As time during the GCSEs is precious, it's important to use it effectively. *“Actively engaging students in self-testing helps them understand where the gaps in their knowledge are and it enables them to witness where they are improving and building confidence.”*

It is also recommended that, despite it seeming the more obvious approach, students should avoid revising one topic at a time when it comes to studying for their exams. Kit recommends that *“they should interleave the topics, doing less of each but more often, repeatedly revisiting them and building up a knowledge.”* This is where “spaced repetition” can come in handy - the idea that if you *“practise something, leave it for a bit and then practise it again”* you will be able to build on your understanding and knowledge retrieval. It's all about building from the foundational content up, rather than each topic at a time.

You can read more about the science of learning on the [Tassomai website](#).



Practical Revision Tips: Help Your Child to Get the Most Out of Their Revision

1. Encourage them to take a **“little and often”** approach to studying. Studies have shown that students learn a lot more when they work for concentrated, short bursts every day, rather than cramming on one day for hours at a time.
2. **Read up on different learning strategies.** Implementing proven techniques such as “interleaving” can help your child to optimise their time spent revising. Interleaving focuses on improving knowledge retention, through switching between topics and returning to them at later dates. By revisiting topics more often, students will become more regularly exposed to concepts and will be able to build upon their knowledge of them more easily.
3. Help your child to **research online resources**. As online learning has become more common, various websites have offered up online learning tools to help students make the most of their time at a computer or on their phone. Be sure to **download past papers**, mark schemes and subject specifications from exam board websites so that everything stays relevant to assessments.
4. Introduce your child to **different revision techniques**. The “Pomodoro” technique was developed in the late 1980s, and is shown to be an extremely effective way to work. It helps to break up stretches of work into manageable chunks, by studying to a 25 minute timer with a 5 minute break in between each round. This can help your child to focus and to do more worthwhile revision.
5. Encourage your child to keep **healthy revision habits**. Different students react to revision stress in different ways, so it’s important to keep an eye on how your child is feeling. If your child is overworking themselves, it may be time to step in and get them to take an hour or two off - this time to rest can be just as important as the revision itself.



Using the Tree to Identify Strengths and Weaknesses

The Tree is Tassomai's visual representation of a learner's knowledge and understanding based on their Tassomai usage and the questions they've answered.

A learner's tree grows over time, and can be used to identify topics they are strongest in, and those that need more work.

How does it work?

Every learner has a separate tree for each subject they're studying on Tassomai. Every topic within that subject relates to a branch of their tree, and each sub-topic (or theme) is represented by a twig.

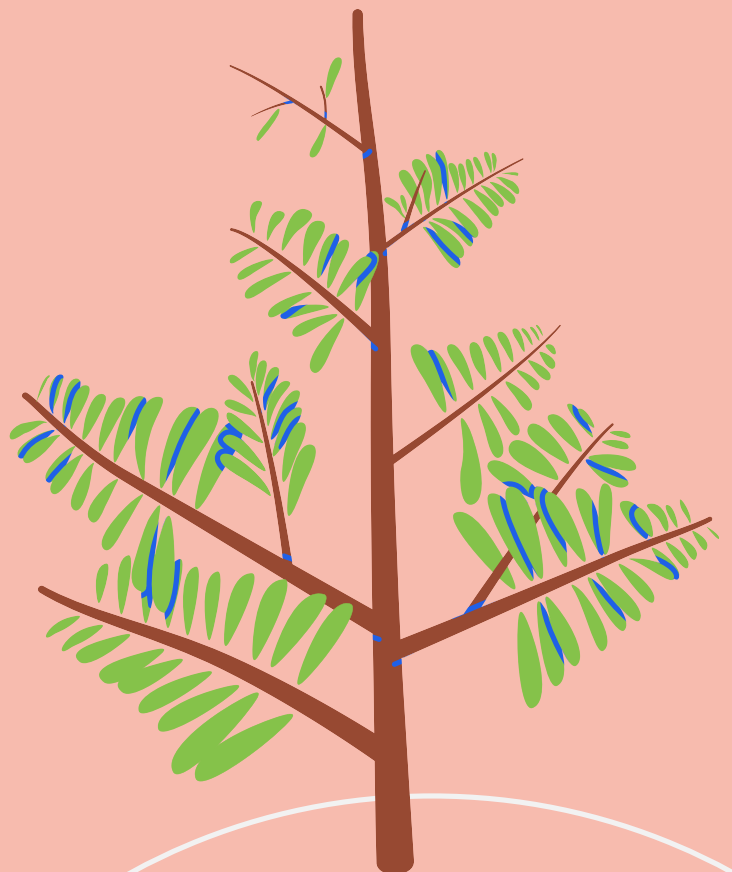
Each leaf on the Tree represents a Tassomai question the learner has attempted, and the colour indicates whether they're answering that question correctly or not. The greener the leaf, the better they're doing. Clicking on a leaf displays a quiz question; click on the red or orange leaves to see the Tassomai questions a learner is struggling with.

Using The Tree for Revision

The Tree is a brilliant tool for parents to help their child map out a revision strategy. Try sitting down together and going through 'red leaf' topics and make a plan of action on how your child can try and improve on these areas. Once they know the areas they need to improve on, they'll be able to focus their efforts and have healthy, green trees flourishing in no time!

[You can find out more about The Tree here.](#)

If you don't already have a Tassomai subscription, you can sign up for our [free 7-day trial](#) on our website.



Revising for GCSEs: Using Past Papers Effectively

Most teachers will agree that doing as many GCSE past papers as possible and going over each subject's specification before the exam will be beneficial. Victoria, a parent from Berkshire, told us that *"doing just one or two past papers alongside my child and then showing him the marking scheme and how to improve his score was transformational. He learnt how to get even higher scores, then he applied the skill to all his other subjects without my involvement."*

Feedback Loops

Past papers can be a great way to identify your child's weaknesses, especially in the first few that they do. When your child first starts doing them, it's a good idea to have them complete each question and then check it against the mark scheme straight away. Checking the answers immediately shortens the 'feedback loop' - feedback is crucial to learning and its value is far greater if applied instantly, so check their answers against the mark scheme right away, not 2 hours or 2 days later!

One science teacher told us that *"students who are successful know how to answer the questions to maximise their marks; exam technique can change a grade! The understanding of the command words in every subject is important."* Becoming familiar with the command words, such as "explain" and "describe", that are used in past papers helps to limit the chance of them misunderstanding the question. This can also help to make students feel at ease when it comes to taking the exam, as they will understand instantly what is being asked of them.

Insight Reports

Pay close attention to the Examiners' Comments - these can be found for every past paper online, often in an **"Insight Report"**. These will tell you where most students lost their marks, so you can see where your child may have made a similar misunderstanding to other students.



Preparing for Exams: What to do When

Sometimes the hardest part of revising is simply knowing where to start! Here we will break down the sorts of techniques our experts think students should be doing in the lead up to an exam...

One Month Before:

- Start quizzing! The best way to know how confident they are in a topic is to quiz them on it
- Use the Tassomai Tree to identify weaker topics that could do with additional work and prioritise them over topics they already feel confident in
- Get your child to explain topics to you - teaching others and switching up looking at a textbook is a great way to embed knowledge



One Week Before:

- Focusing on instant feedback – get your child to answer one question at a time, checking their results against the mark scheme so they learn exactly what the examiners are looking for
- Using them for stamina training – getting in some practice at sitting down and completing an entire paper under timed conditions will help get your child in the headspace for their assessments, but be careful that they don't burn out from doing too many!
- Working on exam technique – ask them to structure a model essay answer or explain how they would work out a complicated question. Planning how they can best use their time in an exam is really important



One Day Before:

- Stop them from attempting to cram too much the night before, it's better to go over a few topics just to jog their memory and then relax
- Have a restful evening with a focus on getting them a good night's sleep and some comfort food – being well fuelled is the best way to face an exam



About Tassomai



About Tassomai

Tassomai is the award-winning* learning and revision app that's helped 1000s of students get top grades at **GCSE** and in other exams like the **Eleven Plus**.

This quiz-based learning program is designed for children from 7 to 17, with exam-board specific content for maths, English, science and more.

Tassomai's algorithm learns as students use the program, adapting content to reinforce strengths and target any weaknesses with personalised daily retrieval practice activities.

Peace of mind for parents

Parents get weekly progress reports and can log in to check progress using tools like the Tree, an innovative way to watch knowledge and understanding grow.

"It was worth every penny of the subscription, I cannot recommend this product highly enough."

– Lisa, parent

Trusted by teachers to help students get top marks

Tassomai is used to support the teaching of core subjects in more than 500 secondary schools in England and Wales.

"In our school we found a direct correlation between pupil progress on Tassomai and attainment at GCSE." – Maha Abdelrahman, Head of Science, Fulham Cross Girls' School

Put Tassomai to the test

Families that don't get Tassomai through schools can sign up as private subscribers and trial the program for **FREE** for 7-days!

Learn more about Tassomai and sign-up online at www.tassomai.com.

You can also contact us on 020 3380 7968 or email enquiries@tassomai.com.

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*Bett Awards winner: Best Educational Resource for Parents or Home Learning

Education Resource Awards winner:
Supplier of the Year 2021 and
Best Collaboration with a School.

