

YOU CAN DO IT!

HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR EXAMS WITHOUT LETTING STRESS GET TO YOU



Academic learning and good mental health and wellbeing should not be at odds with one another. Believe it or not you can have both.

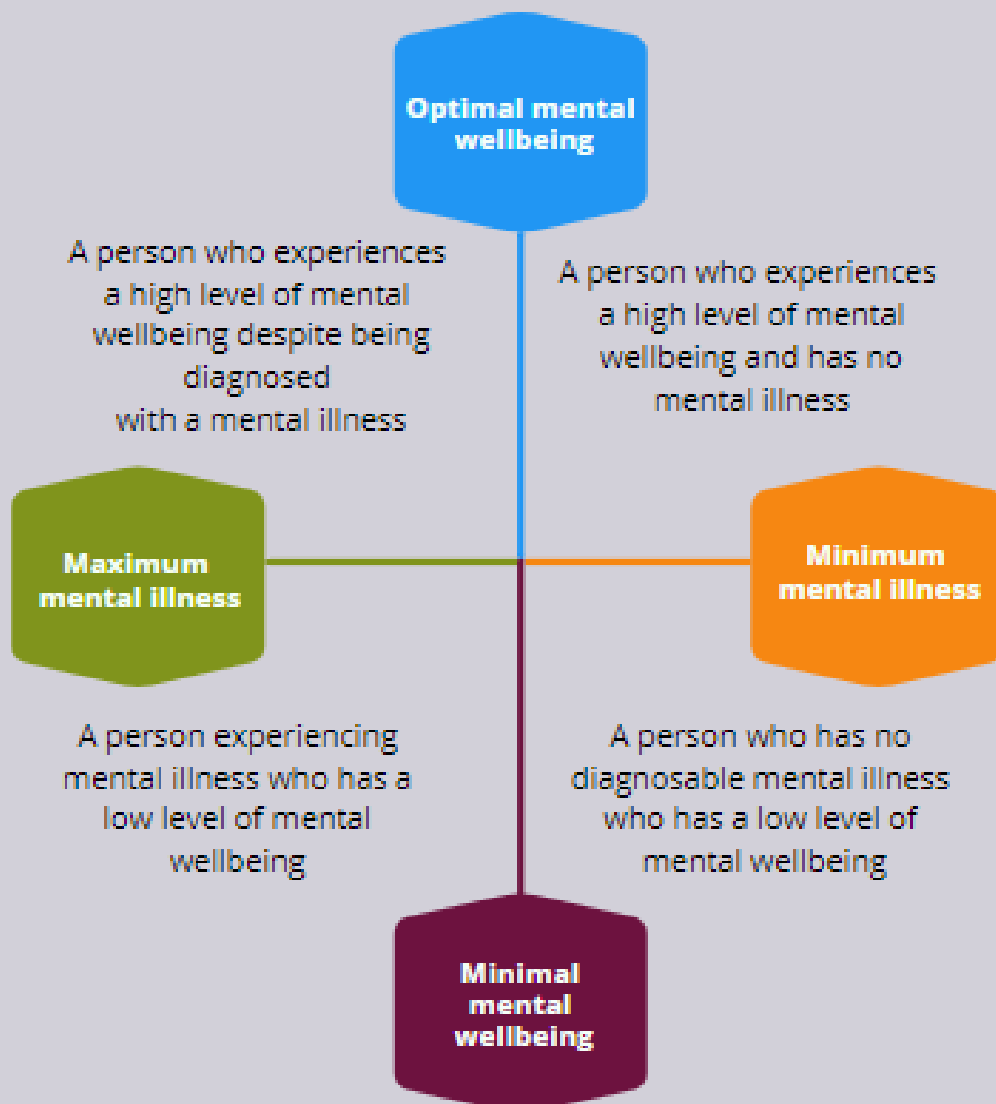
This wellbeing booklet for TKAT's exam year groups is designed to help you keep you mentally fit whilst preparing for your exams.

Feeling a little bit of stress about exams can actually be good for us and help us perform better.

Problems can arise though when levels of stress or anxiety start to interfere with your daily activities and wellbeing. All mental health and wellbeing occurs on a continuum.

Have a look at the diagram. How can we stay in the top two quadrants with optimal wellbeing? That is our aim!

It is normal for our mental wellbeing to dip at times of stress or pressure, we just need to try to do all the right things to ensure it doesn't stay there in the long term.



THE A-Z (ALMOST) OF STAYING SANE WHILE PREPARING FOR YOUR EXAMS

A: ANXIETY

The symptoms of anxiety are a healthy physical and emotional response to any threat of danger we might be facing.

The amygdala in our brains alerts us to danger through the 3Fs:



FIGHT:
HIT IT



FLIGHT:
RUN AWAY FROM IT



FREEZE:
REMAIN
COMPLETELY STILL
AND HOPE IT
DOESN'T NOTICE US

WHAT DOES EXAM ANXIETY FEEL LIKE?

- Butterflies in your stomach
- Headaches, tiredness or shakiness
- Excessive worry or fear about upcoming exams
- Sweating profusely
- Difficulty concentrating
- Inability to recall information
- Panic attacks or rapid breathing

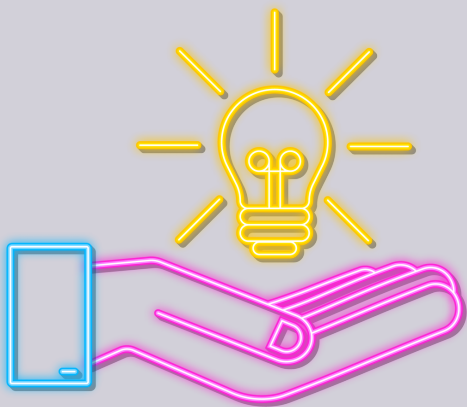
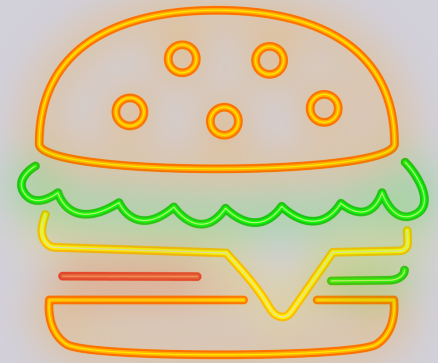
All of these are symptoms of adrenaline which means you are in fight/flight/freeze mode and in an exam it might look like this:

- Having a tendency not to read the questions or instructions properly and therefore waste your time writing something irrelevant
- Instead of focussing on the exam paper, you spend time thinking of reasons you might be allowed to leave the hall, like being sick or going to the toilet
- Your mind goes blank and you're unable to recall anything you have revised.

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO EXAM ANXIETY?

LIFESTYLE FACTORS

- Inadequate rest
- Poor nutrition
- Too many stimulants
- Insufficient exercise
- Not scheduling available time
- Not prioritising commitments

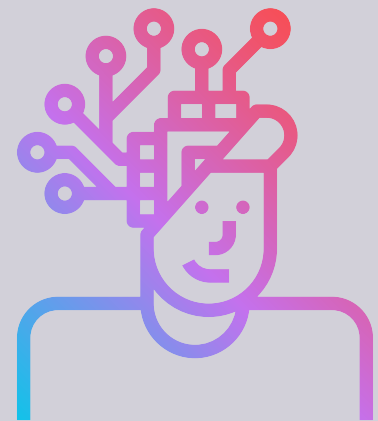


INFORMATION NEEDS

- Strategies in exam taking
- Exam information - dates and locations
- Knowledge of how to apply anxiety reduction techniques

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- Feeling little or no control
- Negative thinking and self-criticism
- Irrational thinking about exams and outcomes
- Pressuring yourself



POOR STUDYING STYLES

INEFFICIENT:

- Inconsistent content coverage; trying to memorise the textbook; binge-studying; studying all night before the exam

INEFFECTIVE:

- Reading without understanding; Unable to recall the material; not making revision notes; not revising



HOW CAN WE MANAGE OUR STRESS LEVELS?

Although some stress can be good to motivate us, keep us alert and ready to tackle challenges, it is important to not let it get out of hand.

Too much stress will keep us from learning and performing at our best.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK: AS SIMPLE AS

A

A = Activating event, for example taking a test activates tension – so plan in advance what you will do to help reduce this tension.

B

B = Belief – be positive and create a set of statements to remind yourself that you can do this.

C

C = Consequences – as a consequence of taking steps to reduce your tension, and reminding yourself of your positive beliefs, you should calm down and feel more able to tackle the exam.

B: BREATHE

This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly, as part of your daily routine, but it can also be used to help calm exam nerves.

You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, or lying on a bed or yoga mat on the floor.

- Make yourself as comfortable as you can.
- If you're lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up. Straighten your legs, or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor.
- If you're sitting, place your arms on the chair arms.
- If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.
- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it. Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

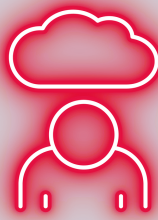
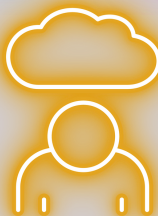
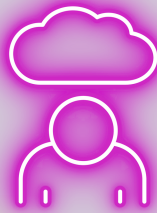
C: CALM

HOW TO CALM DOWN IN LESS THAN A MINUTE:

- Breathe in through your nose and on a slow count of three.
- Push your stomach out as you breathe in.
- Breathe out through your mouth on a slow count of six.
- Repeat two more times



D: DEPRESSION



If you feel you are experiencing low mood in the run up to your exams, please make an appointment to see a Mental Health First Aider in school. They will use **ALGEE** to help you:

- A** - Assess and assist you
- L** - Listen and communicate non-judgmentally
- G** - Give support and information to you
- E** - Encourage you to get appropriate professional help, if necessary
- E** - Encourage other strategies that can support you

E: EXERCISE

Being active is not only great for your physical health and fitness, evidence also shows it can also improve your mental wellbeing by:

- raising your self-esteem
- helping you to set goals or challenges and achieve them
- causing chemical changes in your brain which can help to positively change your mood

Use this link to find lots of ways to get [fit for free](#)



F: FRIENDS AND FAMILY



We are designed to connect with family and friends.

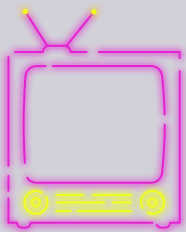
In the run up to exams, stay connected with your family and friends as this will bring huge wellbeing benefits. It increases the levels of oxytocin in our brains which is a fantastic natural anti-depressant, and reduces fear and anxiety.

Good relationships can:

- help you to build a sense of belonging and self-worth
- give you an opportunity to share positive experiences
- provide emotional support and allow you to support others

Make the most of technology to stay in touch with friends and family. Video-chat apps like FaceTime are useful, but don't rely on technology or social media alone to build relationships. It's easy to get into the habit of only ever texting, messaging or emailing people.

G: GOOD HABITS



These habits will help you concentrate as well as reducing stress:

- Take frequent breaks. Psychologists say we can only concentrate properly for 30-45 minutes. You could use a technique like Pomodoro, that helps you to take regular breaks. When you do take a break make sure you don't stay at your desk, you could go for a walk or even just make a cup of tea!
- Eat well. Eat slow-release foods like rice, pasta, fruit and veg to avoid blood sugar highs and lows
- Drink lots of water. People often underestimate how much hydration helps!
- Think about when and where you work best. Not everyone is a morning person, and some people don't find the library a productive place to work. There's no one best place or time to work - it's about what works for you.
- Keep active. A short walk will do - even a 12 minute walk has been shown to increase wellbeing by 20%. Exercising is one of the quickest and most effective ways to de-stress. Fresh air will clear your head and perk you up.
- Try to get about 8 hours' sleep a night. If you're stressed about not being able to sleep, there are lots of ways to aid a good night's sleep (see section on sleep)
- Find activities that help you relax. Maybe it's a hot bath, watching a TV show, or a creative activity. Schedule this down-time into your timetable.

H: HELP

Recognising when you need help and asking for it is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it is a sign of strength.

If you have had time off sick and feel behind or have a practice exam paper in front of you and it just feels too difficult to give it a go...ask for help.

These problems are not insurmountable with the support of others.



I: I AM GOING TO...



Try making a promise to yourself to do one thing every day that will have a positive effect on your wellbeing.

One thing keeps it manageable, but once you've done that one thing you might find yourself wanting to do more.

Why not give yourself a reward when you have completed a revision task? It will act as an incentive!

K: KIND TO YOURSELF

Think about all the things you have achieved so far. It can be helpful to write a list of all the things you like about yourself, and the things other people value about you too.

If people around you are putting pressure on you, it can help to tell them what you feel able to achieve, and let them know that your expectations are different to theirs.

You could also talk to a teacher you trust about the pressure you feel under.

Being kind to yourself also means exercising some self-care...



L: LEARN



Learn the most effective ways to study and revise.

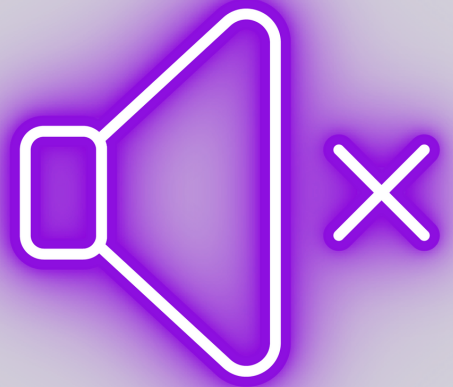
Using these techniques will reassure you that you are doing your best and that it is time well spent.

M: MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a skill and so the more you practice it the more effective it becomes. Mindfulness draws you into the present moment, quieting those inner thoughts that obsess about the past or worry about the future.

To help you, there are apps such as CALM, Headspace and Insight Timer that can take you on guided mindfulness activities. A couple of quick mindfulness activities that can be used in study sessions or the actual exam:

- 'Anchor' yourself by concentrating on the feeling of your feet on the floor and your back against the chair. Focus on those sensations and nothing else for a couple of minutes whilst you breathe slowly and deeply.
- Count what you can see in the room - anything from objects on your desk to patterns on the floor

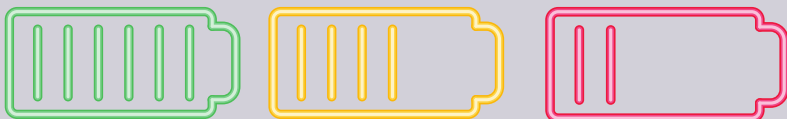


M: MENTAL ENERGY

WHAT EXACTLY IS MENTAL ENERGY?

Our minds are one of the biggest contributors to energy levels.

High levels of mental energy can lead to increased happiness, confidence, focus, willpower, motivation and productivity – all significant benefits for getting through exam periods, but also everyday life.



Mental energy affects:

- Mood – whether we think positively and therefore perform well.
- Motivation and willpower – whether we take initiatives, seize the moment with determination or procrastinate.
- Focus – whether we are effective for the duration a task needs.
- Confidence – how we perceive ourselves and our abilities, we know that this has a direct effect on our performance.

HOW WILL BOOSTING OUR MENTAL ENERGY BENEFIT US?

Improving our mental energy helps us to feel more positive, more confident and more determined.

By feeling more positive, confident and determined, we will be more focused and motivated. By becoming more focused and motivated, we will accomplish more.

Try to spend most time in the green zone, some time in the red and blue zones and as little as possible in the orange zone!



N: NUTRITION

You need to fuel your body with the right foods at the right times to energise your system, improve your alertness and sustain you through long exams.

The wrong food choices can make you feel sluggish, jittery, burned out and crash your energy levels. Exams are like mental marathons so endurance is the key.

Use the following nutrition tips to help you perform at your best:

- Nutritious breakfasts include slow-release carbohydrates, such as porridge oats, whole grain bread or low-sugar muesli. Add a protein food, such as milk, yogurt or eggs, to keep you feeling full for longer.
- Eat at regular times throughout the day and avoid high sugary foods such as pastries, sweets, caffeine and fizzy drinks. These will give you energy highs and crashes. Snacks such as peanut butter on apple slices or cottage cheese on celery sticks, cheese and oat cakes or crackers, toast and marmite, popcorn, yogurt, raw vegetables are all better for you.

BREAKFAST SMOOTHIES

Smoothies are easy to make and can really help if you can't stomach breakfast or are short of time in the morning. Fuel yourself with the right brain boosting nutrients with this yummy recipe.



BANANA, BLUEBERRIES AND PEANUT BUTTER BLAST

This delicious smoothie is just the thing for breakfast - packed with energising banana, oats and some peanut butter for protein:

Use a blender to mix:

1 x small banana

1 x heaped tablespoon of peanut butter

1 x handful of blueberries

1 x tablespoon of oats

1 x generous splash of water/ice/almond milk

1/2 cup of plain yoghurt



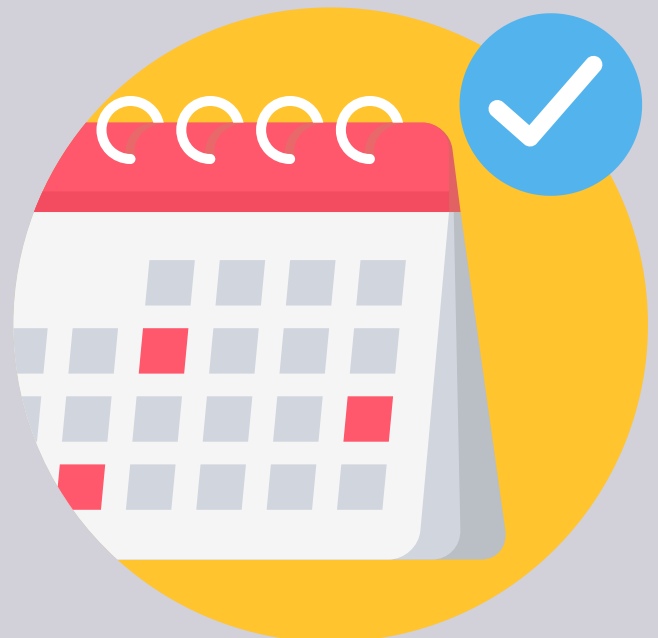
0: ORGANISATION

Imagine your exams as a time-limited project. Are the exams 60 days away? That's your 60-day challenge. Remember there is an endpoint to how you are feeling right now.

Break your revision down into small chunks, and form a plan. Once you've got a plan, you won't have any more dilemmas at the start of the day about what to work on.

Schedule in plenty of free time to unwind, and protect this time. Nobody can work all day every day. If you give yourself plenty of rest you can do the same amount of work in half the time or less.

Equally, don't panic if you go slightly off schedule - tomorrow is another day.



P: PROCRASTINATION



It is generally not true that people who procrastinate are lazy. There is often something else stopping you from starting what you know you need to do. It could be a fear of failure, anxiety about not being good enough, or not knowing where to start or how to prioritise.

If you are procrastinating, take a few minutes to do a short mindfulness activity before your study session. Tune into your thoughts and ask yourself what is the worst that can happen. Create a to-do list for the day and prioritise it with **RED/AMBER/GREEN**.

Q: QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about mental health or wellbeing there are lots of people in school who can help you or signpost you to safe and reliable sources of information.


It could be a Mental Health First Aider, your Pastoral Manager or Head of Year, the Senior Mental Health Leader or School Nurse or Counsellor.

Your tutor will be able to advise you who to go to speak to.



R: ROCKS OF WELLBEING¹³

Completing these 12 Rocks of Wellbeing over the course of a few days can really help increase your levels of happiness and decrease your levels of stress. Use this tracker to help you:



12 Rocks Of Well-Being – Weekly Check

- Rock 1 – Sleep – 8-9 Hours a night
- Rock 2 – Exercise – 20 mins per day
- Rock 3 – Eat and Drink Healthily – complex carbs, protein, low sugar
- Rock 4 – Mindfulness – be present without judgement 5-10 mins
- Rock 5 – Mind Wandering – allow your mind to social problem solve
- Rock 6 – Manage Emotions – notice, accept, share with trust
- Rock 7 – Walk Outside in Nature
- Rock 8 – Listen to Music – 20-30 minutes
- Rock 9 – Connect meaningfully with friends and family
- Rock 10 – Gratitude and Kindness- express both explicitly each day
- Rock 11 – Engage in activities important to your life's purpose
- Rock 12 – Learn, Play, Create, Read

	mon	tues	wed	thurs	fri	sat	sun
total							

S: SLEEP

WHY IS SLEEP SO IMPORTANT?

If we don't get enough sleep, we risk reducing our:

- decision-making skills
- memory
- concentration and efficiency
- alertness
- awareness and ability to respond effectively to situations
- reaction and thinking times.



HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR QUALITY OF SLEEP?

- Avoid big changes to your sleep routine, such as lengthy lie-ins on weekends.
- Avoid doing work close to bedtime so that your brain can 'wind down'.
- Avoid screens and stressful discussions/activities close to bedtime.
- Create a relaxing pre-bed routine, free from over-stimulation from screens, sugar and caffeine.
- Incorporate exercise into your day, but not too close to bedtime.
- Allow enough time in between dinner and sleep so that you aren't too full and your body won't be busy digesting food.
- Write down any thoughts or concerns to help avoid them 'buzzing' around your head.

HOW CAN WE WIND DOWN BEFORE BED?

- Turn phones off!
- Have some alone time, listen to music, read a book (for enjoyment!) or relax doing yoga.
- Get some fresh air by taking a relaxing walk.
- Have a bath.
- Many of the 12 Rocks of Wellbeing will help prepare you for better quality sleep

T: TEENAGE BRAIN

Our brains don't stop developing until we are around 24 years old.

The teenage years are when your brain is trimmed and pruned to make it into an efficient thinking machine by the time you are an adult. Your brain is therefore larger at age 10 than it is at 20!

Teenagers therefore have the combined curiosity and open-mindedness of a child with some of the advanced cognitive skills that adults have. This makes you totally brilliant!

Teenagers also develop more of an awareness of their surroundings meaning you are more easily distracted!

Your brain also has high levels of dopamine during adolescence which means you are more prone to risk-taking behaviour. However your brain is better equipped for exams than it has ever been before as you are able to organise your work, prioritise what's important and focus on your goals.



U: USEFUL APPS

Moodpanda

www.moodpanda.com

Mood panda is an app-based platform allowing people to track their moods

Smiling Mind

<https://smiling.mind.au>

A modern meditation app for young people, using mindfulness to boost calmness, contentment and clarity.

SuperBetter

<https://www.superbetter.com>

Helps young people build resilience to become stronger, happier and healthier.

Get Self Help

www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Free cognitive behavioural based self-help and therapy resources

Mindshift app

www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/

Helps teens and young people cope with anxiety

Moodkit

www.thriveport.com/products/moodkit/

Approved by NHS Choices and one of Healthline's Best Apps for Depression and Anxiety

SAM

<http://sam-app.org.uk>

Self-help app for anxiety

Calm harm

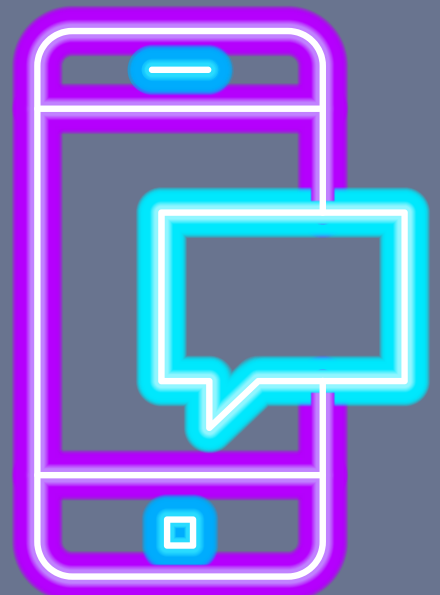
<http://www.stem4.org.uk/calmharm/>

App aimed at helping young people resist the urge to self harm

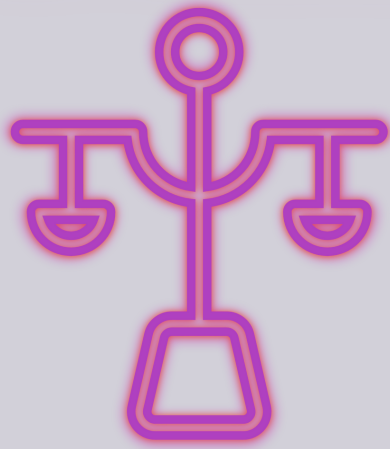
Clear Fear

www.clearfear.co.uk

App aimed at helping people deal with physical and mental symptoms of anxiety



W: WORK-LIFE BALANCE



Stress and overwork can have a counter-productive impact, stopping us from learning and retaining information.

You will know when you are working too hard when studying starts eating into the things that keep you healthy like eating well, exercising, hobbies and social contact with friends.

If we give these things up in order to work harder in the run up to exams, your brain will not function as well, just at the time when it needs to be at it's best.

HOW TO CREATE A BALANCED ACTIVITY TIMETABLE IN THE RUN-UP TO EXAMS

- Make a list of all the things that keep you healthy and sane
- They can be divided into Physical / Relaxation / Socialising / Creativity
- Try to incorporate an activity for half an hour each day
- Try to engage in the others over the course of a week

MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
Football practice	Walk the dog	Mindfulness app	Walk the dog	Games night with mates	Games night with mates	Mindfulness app

- These activities are fixed in your diary and you plan your revision around them.

PLAN YOUR REVISION AROUND YOUR LIFE,
RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND
(WHICH IS HOW MOST PEOPLE DO IT)

Y: YOUR SOURCES OF SUPPORT, INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

If you would like further information on anything related to mental health or wellbeing, please **DO NOT SEARCH ON GOOGLE**. Here are a list of safe, evidence-based organisations you can contact for more information:



The Mix

Free, confidential support for young people.

www.themix.org.uk

0808 808 4994



Young Minds

Mental health charity for children, young people and their parents.

If you're a young person struggling to cope, text YM to 85258 for free, 24/7 support.

www.youngminds.org.uk



No Panic

A charity specialising in self-help techniques for those with anxiety disorders.

Youth Helpline: 0330 606 1174

www.nopanic.org.uk



Childline

Counselling service for parents, children and young people

Helpline: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

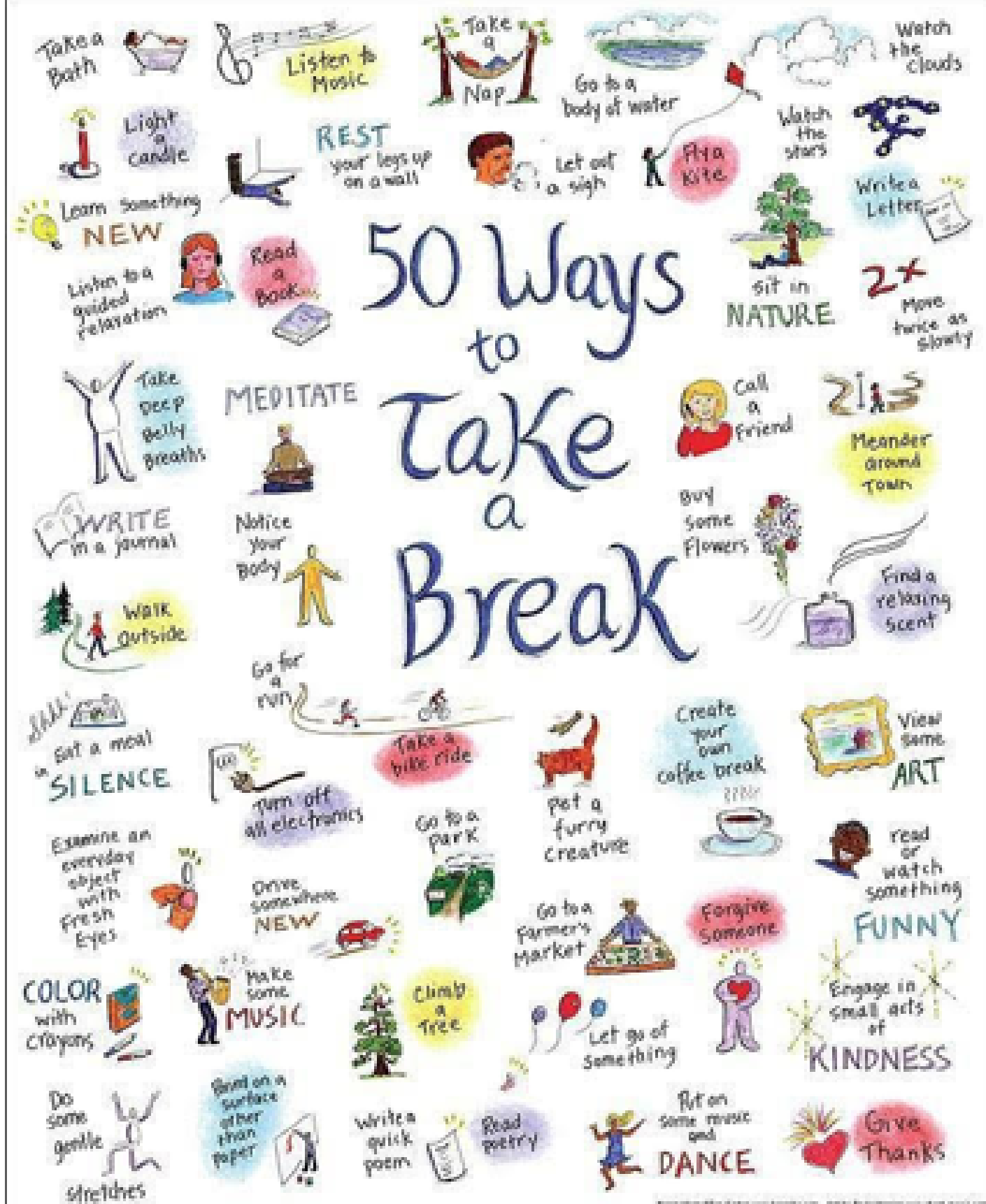


Kooth

Kooth is a free online service offering emotional and mental health support for children and young people

Helpline: 0800 1111

www.kooth.com





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