



a newsletter for parents & families



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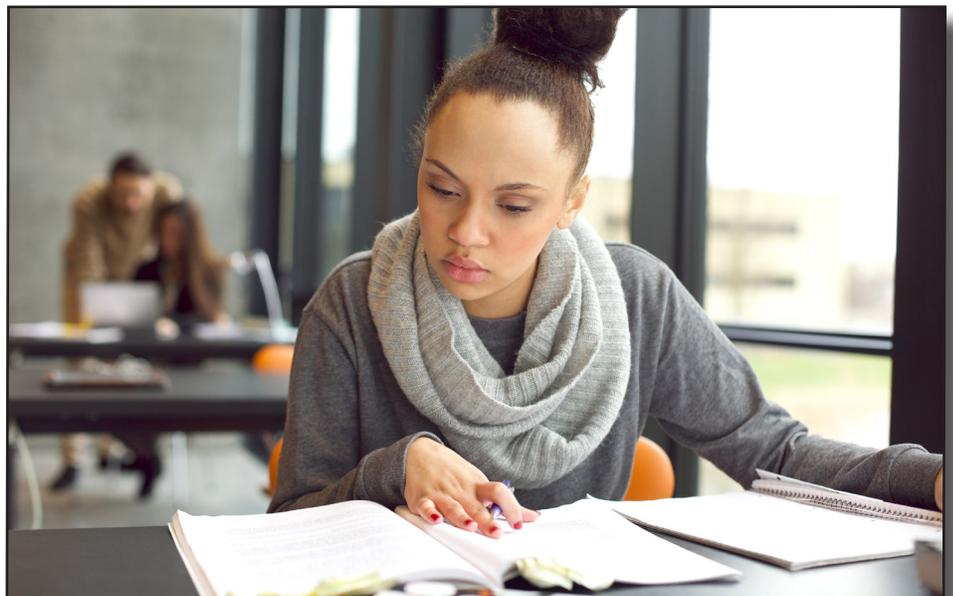
December 2018

## Preparing Before Exams to Minimize Test Anxiety

As final exams approach, some students work themselves into a frenzy – worrying about how they'll do and wondering if they've worked hard enough this term. A bit of test anxiety may be taking hold, yet there are ways your student can prepare before exams to make this finals season less stressful and more successful.

The University of Chicago's Academic Center for Excellence recommends the following strategies before taking an exam. You can share them with your student...

- **Put Things in Perspective.** Your whole future doesn't depend on this one exam. You and your family are healthy. Take a moment to wrap the exam in an overall context of perspective.
- **Remind Yourself of Past Successes.** You've done well on past exams. And the admissions office admitted you for a reason!
- **Don't Give a Test the Power to Define You.** Your performance is important, yet it doesn't cement your place as the smartest/least smart student in class. Instead, it's about how effectively you studied, your test-taking strategies and more.



- **Visualize Completing the Test Successfully.** Walk yourself through the moment you wake up on exam day to when you finish the test. Aah!
- **Remind Yourself That a Bit of Anxiety Can be Helpful.** A certain level of anxiety about an exam can actually help you perform your best.
- **Give Yourself Practice Exams.** This can help you practice your test-taking skills as well as your anxiety control. Timed practice questions can also help if you're afraid you won't finish an exam on time.
- **Get a Good Night's Sleep.** For several days before the exam, be sure to get adequate sleep so your mind will work clearly and your ability to deal with anxiety will improve.
- **Reduce Your Caffeine Intake.** High anxiety can increase caffeine's impact, so consider reducing your intake on test days to keep the jitters at bay.

**Source:** Cecilia Downs, University of Chicago's Academic Center for Excellence, as published by Brown University's Counseling and Psychological Services page



# Steering Clear of All-Nighters: Advice for Students

Many students believe that pulling all-nighters to cram for final exams is necessary and expected. However, study after study show that depriving the brain of sleep can cause dysfunction that does more harm than good.

“Sleep deprivation’s effect on working memory is staggering,” said David Earnest, PhD, a professor with the Texas A&M College of Medicine who studies circadian rhythms (our 24-hour body clocks), as reported by *Science Daily*. “Your brain loses efficiency with each hour of sleep deprivation.”

According to Earnest, here are some things to let students know about all-nighters...

- Pulling an all-nighter only activates short-term memory when what is needed to recall and retain most facts is long-term memory
- Performance for learning and memory is higher during the morning and day, not late at night, so the brain’s performance significantly decreases when you fight against your body’s natural rhythms

## Study Prep

“The optimal study method is to stay on top of things and prepare by studying in small chunks (20 to 30 minutes), multiple times per day, three to four days in advance of the test,” advised David Earnest, PhD, a professor with the Texas A&M College of



Medicine. “By going through information numerous times, you’re allowing your brain to move those facts to long-term memory for better recall... Repeating information, whether out loud or verbalizing it in your thoughts, helps spur this process forward.”

- Trying to comprehend information at the last minute by cramming typically doesn’t work well
- It’s better to study as much as you can until bedtime and then

wake up early to review materials before a test than to pull an all-nighter because sleep rejuvenates the brain

**Source:** Texas A&M University, 9/19/16, reported by *Science Daily*

## Seasonal Student Issues

There’s a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- Panic, fear and cramming as finals and paper deadlines approach
- High temper as stress mounts
- The realization that some friends may not be returning next year
- Increased pressure to participate in sexual activity because of the approach of vacation and extended separation
- Financial strain due to holiday gifts and travel costs
- Religious conflicts, as he/she gets ready to return home after a term of gaining new perspectives
- Excitement/anxiety about returning home
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs



# Agreeing to Disagree

## Having family/friend discussions during break with people who have varying perspectives

When students return home for the holidays, they'll likely engage in discussions with family members and friends. Due to the things they've learned and experienced at college, students' perspectives on certain topics may have changed. And this can sometimes lead to arguments.

Politics, diversity, religion... there are any number of hot-button topics that can start a verbal tussle. Yet, it's important for all involved to keep in mind that disagreements can actually be good for your family/friend relationships.

The key is agreeing to disagree in a respectful, open-minded manner. Some keys to doing that well include...

- **Engaging.** Let people know that, just because you have had differences in opinion before, you're still very interested in hearing what they have to say about things. Don't avoid the tough topics. You can learn a great deal from one another by engaging in meaty conversations!
- **Listening.** Allow others to say their piece, without interrupting to inject your opinion. Show that you're listening by maintaining eye contact, keeping an open posture and reflecting some of the things they are saying. Sometimes just knowing that you're being *listened to* makes all the difference in the world.
- **Keeping an Open Mind.** We can all change our minds once we hear the facts – or those facts can clarify a pre-existing opinion. Stay open to that possibility as you exchange opinions and perspectives with other people. It's all part of being a growing, engaged human being.
- **Not Taking Differences in Opinion Personally.** If someone takes a different stance than you do, it's not because they hate you or disrespect you. It's likely because they have had experiences that have led them to form a different opinion. It's really not about you.



Learning to engage in meaningful discussion with others, especially those who disagree, is a critical step for students as they develop adult relationships with people they hold dear. Let the conversations begin!



### Face-to-Face Disagreements

Sometimes the intense conversations happen when you and your student are face to face, whether it's during a weekend visit home, Parent/Family Weekend or a holiday break. Your initial tendency may be to "keep the peace" during your limited face time with your student. Yet, avoiding topics that could lead to disagreements can cause important things to go unsaid. So, encourage your student to express his opinions, whether you agree or not. And ask that he listen to yours. That face time may result in your communication patterns opening wider as you and your student learn to talk about the tough stuff, disagreements and all.



# Supporting Students Through the Final Stretch

While December is a time for holiday cheer, it can also be a very stressful time for students. From academic to social pressures, they're likely being pulled in several directions.

You can support your student by...

- Texting to check in so your student knows you care, but not being offended if he takes some time to respond.
- Waiting to discuss important details or have thoughtful conversations until after finals are over – when possible.
- Understanding the pressure she is facing and validating her frustrations and stress levels.
- Helping him keep things in perspective and take things step by step (i.e. this will all be over in just a few weeks, grades aren't everything, etc.).
- Offering to take responsibility for the things you can (i.e. picking up gifts or running last minute errands, etc.).
- Making suggestions for eliminating stress.
- Reminding him to take care of himself – this is probably the last thing he'll want to hear ("Sleep? Are you kidding, Mom?"), but the reminders to get adequate sleep and food are still important.

Overall, your student may just need a listening ear during these next few weeks. If that's the case, let her vent, validate her feelings and remind her how much she is loved. More often than not, this is the most helpful thing you can do during this busy time of year.

## Preparing for Your Student's Return

As you prepare to have your student home for the winter holidays, here are a few things to keep in mind...

**Make Sure Your Student Has a Space.** It's common for rearranging to take place once a student has departed for school. Has your student lost his bedroom? If so, make sure you prepare a space for him to sleep and store belongings, prior to coming home. This way, your student won't feel displaced or like he's a burden.

**Talk With Your Student About Lifestyle Changes.** Rather than waiting until your student comes home, talk beforehand. It's quite likely that your student's sleeping, eating, dressing and thinking patterns have changed somewhat during the last few months. Try to avoid surprises by discussing these new habits and perspectives ahead of time.

**Prepare Siblings for Your Student's Return Home.** If there are other children in the family, they will be anticipating your student's arrival, too. Remind them that your student will be very excited to see them, but also will have a lot to do while she is home. This will help alleviate disappointment if there is not enough time for extensive one-on-one interaction.



### Reconnect with your student by...

- Planning a family game night
- Going to a coffee shop
- Sharing photos from the last few months
- Attending a local school event
- Staying up late one night chatting
- Cooking Sunday breakfast
- Asking for her help setting up a computer program
- Making cookies together the night before he heads back to school so he can share them with friends