

A Guide for Parents and Guardians on Supporting Leaving Certificate Students

The months leading up to, and during, the Leaving Certificate examinations, can be a difficult time for you and your family. Your support for your young person is invaluable. It can be a time of stress and worry for you as you wonder whether they are studying enough, studying too much or will do well enough to get the course or job that they want next year. You have to carefully balance the boundaries between you and then, for example when to get involved and when to stay back and this can be hard.

While many Leaving Certificate students are coping well, some will find it stressful and anxiety provoking at times. Each young person will have their own unique way of coping.

As a parent, there are a number of things that you can do to support your young person's wellbeing, including the following:

Routine and Staying focused

- Creating a study routine is helpful but some students will find studying and sticking to a timetable challenging. They may also find it difficult to motivate themselves or to stay motivated. They may need extra support and gentle encouragement from you.
- Emphasise that including social, physical and enjoyable activities in their routine are essential to maintaining their wellbeing.
- It's important to encourage your young person to eat healthily and to keep hydrated and to include regular mealtimes and breaks into their routine. Eating meals with the family is also a way for them to keep connected.
- They should be encouraged to move during these breaks.
- Planning how they should approach their subjects can be daunting and as a result it may be helpful to suggest that they start with a subject they really enjoy, then move to a subject that is more challenging for them and finish with something they like.
- Listen to your young person and their concerns. If lack of motivation is an issue, you can normalise this, and reassure them that lots of students feel this way.
- Help them to focus on short, medium and long term goals:
 - A short-term goal may be completing a block of work and then getting outside in the fresh air and/or link in with friends.
 - A medium-term goal may be discussing with them what they would like to do to mark the end of their exams.
 - A long-term goal may relate to their post Leaving Certificate education/work plans and what they need to do to get there.
- All goals should be realistic and achievable and it may be useful for students to write them down so they can refer to them when they are feeling less motivated.
- Your young person may have productive and unproductive days while following their independent study plan. It may be helpful if they log their achieved or partially achieved tasks each day, possibly using a diary, to provide a sense of success. This will reassure them in a concrete way that they are making progress.

- Talk to your young person about their work and praise their efforts.

Expect Emotions – students

Despite everyone's best efforts, preparing for examinations is stressful for young people and their families and it is not unusual for some young people to have a lot of emotions. They may feel stressed, anxious, sad, afraid, fed up, angry, frustrated or even numb. Or some may feel nothing at all. These are all normal and healthy reactions to stressful situations. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel. Further resources on stress, anxiety and fear, are available below.

- Strategies that may be useful in helping your young person to deal with their anxiety are available in NEPS [Managing Stress and Anxiety: A Guide for Parents and Guardians](#)

Expect Emotions – parents/carers

This is a challenging time for you as a parent/carer. It is important to be aware of your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions, as these may affect your young person.

- How you cope and behave in this situation will influence how your young person copes and behaves. They will pick up on both your verbal and non-verbal cues.
- It is extremely important for you to dedicate some time to look after yourself in order to be able to support your young person at home. This may mean creating time in your day for some self-care, like watching a favourite TV show, practising some relaxation techniques or exercising. When you have taken time to support yourself you will be in a stronger position to support those around you. The Department of Health [Let's Get Set](#) has useful information for adults.
- Keeping in contact with other parents to talk and share experiences will be a valuable support to you at this time. The Parent Council or Parent Association in your young person's school will be an important source of information and way of keeping in contact with the school and other parents.
- You might also find it useful to contact the National Parents' Council (Post Primary) Facebook page at [face book NPC facebook NPC Post-primary](#)

Online Activity

- Connecting with friends online is very important and should be viewed as a positive activity. Encourage them to incorporate their online interactions into their routine rather than them happening while they are trying to study. It may be useful to have a conversation with them about sourcing reputable information online as there will be a lot of 'Fake News' about the Leaving Certificate.

A Marathon not a Sprint

- Help and encourage your young person to reward themselves frequently and to plan for things that will motivate them to get through this time. Remember reward works better than punishment. You know your young person best and what motivates them, for example you may suggest driving lessons, planning a short break with friends or family later in the year, doing up their bedroom or helping them look for a part time job when the Leaving Certificate is over.

- They will need to take regular breaks and days off from their studies in order to stay motivated and promote their wellbeing.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your young person's school and teachers know them well and will be happy to help problem solve with both of you, around issues you are experiencing. Schools and teachers understand that everyone is struggling and are accommodating in their expectations. Try not to have unrealistic expectations of yourself or your young person.
- The following resources and supports aim to help you in supporting your young person at this time. Included is information for you if you are feeling an increase in your stress levels and anxiety.

LINK TO PDF'S

- [NEPS Relaxation Podcast](#)
- NEPS [How to Calm and Support your child: A guide for Parents and Guardians](#)
- [Link to government campaign Let's Get Set](#)

For some students, levels of stress and distress emerge over this difficult time and it may be that the supports offered by the school-based team are not able to fully meet their needs. In these cases, staff may need to signpost students to other services. A range of HSE, HSE funded and NGO services is available here - [Mental Health and Wellbeing Information Leaflet](#).