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FREE RESOURCE — GUIDE

Exam Stress Toolkit

Practical techniques for exam anxiety: what stress is doing, three in-the-moment resets, a thought-reframing worksheet and when to ask for help.

3	6-count	1	24/7
IN-THE-MOMENT RESETS	SLOW EXHALE	WEEKLY PRESSURE CHECK	SUPPORT LINES LISTED

BREATHING · GROUNDING · REFRAMING · ASKING FOR HELP

PREPARED BY	CATEGORY	EDITION	LATEST VERSION
BrightStudy	Focus and wellbeing	2026, A4 PDF	brightstudy.ai/resources/exam-stress-toolkit

What is inside

Some stress before an exam is useful; it sharpens attention. Too much shuts down the working memory you need to think. This toolkit explains the difference, then gives you tools for each stage: a breathing reset and a grounding routine for the moment panic arrives, a worksheet for catching and reframing the catastrophic thoughts that fuel it, a weekly pressure check to notice when things are building, and a clear page on the signs that mean it is time to talk to someone and who that can be. Nothing here replaces professional help; it is the first-aid kit for ordinary exam pressure.

SECTIONS

1. What stress is doing
2. Catching and reframing thoughts
3. Weekly pressure check
4. When and how to ask for help

WHO IT IS FOR

Students who feel exam pressure building, friends and parents who want to help, and teachers looking for a handout.

WHAT IS INCLUDED

- What stress does to thinking, and why some is useful
- Three in-the-moment resets: slow exhale, 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, the next small action
- Thought-catching and reframing worksheet with worked examples
- Weekly pressure check with a simple traffic-light score
- When and how to ask for help: signs, people, UK support lines

01

What stress is doing

Stress is a physical response: adrenaline, a faster heart, attention narrowed to the threat. At a moderate level it helps; you are alert and quick. Above that level it floods working memory, the part of your mind that holds a question while you work on it, which is why panic makes a question you know feel impossible. The tools in this pack bring the level back down so your working memory comes back.

LEVEL	WHAT IT FEELS LIKE	WHAT HELPS
Useful	Alert, a bit nervous, able to focus	Nothing; use it
High	Racing thoughts, tight chest, rereading without taking in	An in-the-moment reset; then the next small action
Overwhelmed	Blank mind, shaking, tears, wanting to leave	Reset, then tell someone; this is the level to get support for if it keeps happening

THREE IN-THE-MOMENT RESETS

- **Slow exhale.** Breathe in for four, out for six, three times. The long exhale slows the heart directly.
- **5-4-3-2-1.** Name five things you can see, four you can hear, three you can touch, two you can smell, one you can taste. It pulls attention out of the spiral and into the room.
- **The next small action.** Not "do the exam" but "read question 1". Not "revise Chemistry" but "open the notes to page 12". Movement dissolves panic.

02

Catching and reframing thoughts

Stress is fed by thoughts that run unchallenged. Write them down; on paper they are smaller.

WORKED EXAMPLES

THOUGHT	EVIDENCE FOR	EVIDENCE AGAINST	WHAT I WOULD TELL A FRIEND	MORE ACCURATE THOUGHT
If I fail this, my life is over	It is an important exam	Resits exist; many people succeed after a poor exam; one grade is not a life	That one exam cannot decide everything	This matters and I have prepared; if it goes badly there are other routes
Everyone else is more prepared than me	Some friends seem calm	I do not know what they have done; calm is not the same as prepared; I have done X and Y	You are comparing your inside with their outside	I have done real work; I will focus on my own plan
I always mess up under pressure	I did badly in one mock	I have passed many tests; the mock was before I fixed my timing	One result is not a pattern	I have had bad exams and good ones; I know what went wrong last time and have fixed it

MY THOUGHTS

THOUGHT	EVIDENCE FOR	EVIDENCE AGAINST	WHAT I WOULD TELL A FRIEND	MORE ACCURATE THOUGHT

03

Weekly pressure check

Once a week, rate each line 0 (not at all), 1 (sometimes) or 2 (most days). Add them up.

THIS WEEK I…	WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4	WK 5	WK 6
Had trouble falling or staying asleep						
Skipped meals or ate much more or less than usual						
Could not concentrate even on easy tasks						
Felt panicky, shaky or sick when thinking about exams						
Avoided friends or things I usually enjoy						
Felt hopeless or that it is pointless trying						
Total						

WHAT THE TOTAL MEANS

SCORE	LEVEL	DO
0-3	Green	Normal pressure. Keep the routines: sleep, breaks, exercise.
4-7	Amber	Building. Use the resets daily; cut study hours slightly; talk to someone you trust this week.
8-12	Red	Too much. Tell a parent, teacher, tutor or wellbeing service now. Read the next page.

04

When and how to ask for help

SIGNS IT IS TIME TO TALK TO SOMEONE

- [ ] Not sleeping for several nights, or sleeping all the time
- [ ] Panic attacks: sudden intense fear with a racing heart, shaking or breathlessness
- [ ] Not eating, or eating to cope
- [ ] Feeling hopeless, numb or that nothing matters
- [ ] Thoughts of harming yourself
- [ ] Using alcohol or drugs to get through
- [ ] Friends or family saying they are worried about you

Asking for help is not weakness and it is not failing the exam. The people below have heard it all before and know what to do. Say it plainly: "I am finding exam stress hard to cope with and I need some help."

WHO TO CONTACT

WHO	GOOD FOR	HOW
Parent, carer or a trusted adult	The first conversation; practical changes at home	Pick a calm moment; show them this page if it is easier than talking
Teacher, tutor or form tutor	Workload, extensions, exam access arrangements	Email or after a lesson; ask for a ten-minute chat
School or university wellbeing or counselling service	Ongoing support, strategies, referrals	Ask at reception or on the student portal; many have same-week slots
GP	Sleep problems, anxiety, low mood that will not shift	Book an appointment; say it is about exam stress and mood
Childline (under 19s)	Any time, any worry	0800 1111, or chat online at childline.org.uk
Shout	Text support, any time	Text SHOUT to 85258
Samaritans	Any time, any age	116 123 (free), or jo@samaritans.org
Emergency	If you or someone else is in immediate danger	Call 999 or go to A&E

Keep going

BRIGHTSTUDY

This resource covers the part of studying that happens away from a screen. BrightStudy does the rest: upload your notes, slides or recordings and it turns them into Study Docs, flashcards and exam-style questions, then schedules your reviews with spaced repetition. There is a free plan to get started.

PAIRS WELL WITH FOCUS AND WELLBEING

FEATURE	WHAT IT DOES	LINK
Study Calendar	Plan revision, exams, deadlines and events.	brightstudy.ai/features/study-calendar
Themes	Choose the look and atmosphere of your study space.	brightstudy.ai/features/themes
AI Tutors	Ask questions and explore difficult concepts.	brightstudy.ai/features/ai-tutors
Progress Analytics	Track your study activity and performance.	brightstudy.ai/features/progress

RELATED RESOURCES

RESOURCE	LINK
Focus Session Tracker	brightstudy.ai/resources/pomodoro-focus-tracker
Sleep and Energy Log	brightstudy.ai/resources/sleep-and-energy-log
30-Day Study Habit Tracker	brightstudy.ai/resources/study-habit-tracker



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