

QT Indian Experience



Reports by **Mehre Alam**
For events and press releases, email
qatar.editor@qatar-tribune.com or
call (974) 4000 2222

DOHA PARENTS HELP THEIR WARDS BEAT EXAM BLUES

“Stress should be a powerful driving force, not an obstacle.” — Bill Phillips.

DARE disagree with the American entrepreneur and author? Of course, you won't! He is absolutely spot on, isn't he? However, for a very large number of students of grades X and XII in Indian schools whose Board exams have just about commenced, it's easier said than done. For it's not easy beating the exam blues — sleepless nights, heightened heartbeat, diminished appetite, you name it and the symptoms can be seen telling on their worried countenances.

Sanjeev Kumar Das, Head, French, at DPS Modern School, Qatar, is all for the delineation of the concept in the first place. “Exam stress or anxiety born out of that stress can be defined as fear or worry about performance in an examination.”



Sanjeev Kumar Das

teachers becomes pivotal in managing the stress levels of the students during the examination days, as they often carry very high expectations on their young shoulders. There are the coveted colleges they are eyeing at this stage. And the fear of failure haunts. However, adds Das, “Yes, the stress associated with exams may be overwhelming and intense but it still is manageable. Teachers and parents must find ways to help the students overcome stress. They must encourage them to do their best but at the same time they must not push them [students] too far as it may prove to be rather stressful.

“Their only goal should be to keep the students in high spirits and provide them with psychological and other support so that they feel self-assured and calm before they enter the examination hall. It is often seen that most teachers and parents motivate the students using the fear of failure. It is wrong. During the exam preparation days, the teachers must help the students identify their interests and strengths, and reinforce their self-esteem so as to dispel their stress as most students dealing with stress keep looking at the negative factors only.”

As for the teachers, notes Das, they



IMAGE BY MOHAMED HASSAN FROM PIXABAY

should ensure the students are well-versed with the topics for the exams. For that they must help the students review and go through all the important details of the topics before the exam. “It will help them [students] retain what they have learned and then answer the questions in the exam hall in a smooth and confident manner,” he explains.

“The teachers must encourage the students to think positive in such a way that they don't see the challenges ahead of them as something so big that they cannot surmount. The teachers must also help the students keep themselves away from all distractions such as social media sites — WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook etc,” the DPS Modern School teacher adds.

“It has been found that some students feel shy in sharing their stress-related issues so the teachers must find out their reasons for the exam stress, encouraging them to open up about the issues they face. In addition, during the preparation days, the teachers should help the students calm their nerves during the exam days by encouraging them to try out some mindfulness and relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, to release their stress.”

However, it can be a daunting task for any parent. Doha-based couple Yusuf Shamim and Samina Anique admit the exam time can be a challenging experience for anyone, especially those



Yusuf Shamim with his son

whose wards are writing the CBSE Class X boards. “My son, Rayan has been focused on his studies. But as a parent, I and my wife always encourage him to stay away from tension and ask questions and consult his teachers for any doubts,” says Samina Anique. Sharing their list of Dos, Samina says that sticking to a time table has helped her son a lot in preparing for his exams and to keep himself away from all sorts of anxiety and stress.

“His mother takes good care of him by preparing healthy food and occasionally I bring him his favourite fast food, as good food makes good mood. While on breaks, he loves to play moving football indoors, as he believes this is the best stress buster. He gets good eight hours of sleep plus a short nap during day time, so he gets all the energy to study until late hours,” reveals the father, Yusuf Shamim.

A lot many parents obsess over the marks obtained by their wards and this is a plain truth that Seema Bhardwaj, an educator by profession and an engineer by qualification, is uncom-



Seema Bhardwaj

fortable with. “Obsessing over marks makes the ‘exam experience’ taxing for everyone involved — teachers, parents and students. Marks are just a number and a student's competition should be with themselves only,” asserts Seema, a mother of two daughters. Her younger daughter is currently writing her class XII board examinations.

“As an educator, I have been helping students prepare for CBSE examinations for the last 20 years. I encourage students to challenge and overcome their self-limiting beliefs: to achieve what they think is impossible. Preparing for tests can be a rewarding experience, an opportunity to learn more and realise one's weaknesses. Lately, my role has been ensuring that my daughter goes cycling daily and giving her tasty and healthy food! Every night I tell her, ‘You and your health are important to me, so sleep well’. As a parent, the best way you can help your child prepare for exams is to simply support them,” notes Seema.

Often, sleep deprivation becomes an issue with the children and this can potentially aggravate the situation. “It's often noticed that some students do not have proper sleep before appearing for the examination, which affects their performance. That's why



Jawed Ahmad

sound sleep is very important the night before any examination,” points out Jawed Ahmad, chairman, AMU Alumni Association, Qatar.

“Several students complain that they are fully engaged with school and coaching classes and do not get sufficient time for self-study,” adds Ahmad, whose elder daughter, Almas Ahmad, is appearing in the class XII Board examination.

Offering his advice to students, the engineer says self-study is very important to understand and hone the preparation to perfection.

8 tips for parents from an expert

There's no running away from exams-related stress and anxiety, as they are common in children in today's fast-paced life, says Monica Gupta, a BTech and MBA (International Business).



Monica Gupta

“As a parent it's our responsibility to help them and make them ready to face it [stress]. There are several ways we can support our children in coping with exam-related anxiety and tension. Here are some useful tips:

- Creating a positive and supportive atmosphere at home by encouraging your child to discuss their concerns about the exams which would help avoid any kind of pressure on the child.
- Be a good listener and offer words of encouragement to your child.
- It's important to ensure a healthy lifestyle by ensuring that the child is getting proper nutritious food and enough sleep.
- Encourage them to take regular breaks while studying; allow them to do some physical activities involving their hobbies to avoid burnout and mental fatigue.
- Help your children to manage time effectively and create a productive study plan — what to revise and when to revise — into manageable chunks.
- My personal tip is to incentivize kids to do practice past papers keeping time into account, so they know what to do while writing the actual exam.
- Help them to see their mistakes and setbacks and encourage them to correct them as this is part of the learning process.
- Every child is different; they have different ways to handle stress. So being positive, patient, and supportive during the exam can help them overcome their anxieties and bring the best out of them.

‘Tell your child, doing well in exam is important but it's not everything’

KEEPING calm is important and parents should explain to their children that while doing well in exam is important, it's not everything, says Dr Nadeem Jilani, Senior Attending Physician Pediatric Emergency Sidra Medicine, and Medical Director Sidra Child Advocacy Program.

Suicide rates among teens and young adults have shown an increased trends in the months leading to exams or soon after while waiting for results, points out Dr Jilani, who's been working in the field of Child Health for more than 25 years. Trained both in India and the UK and currently working in the largest tertiary referral children's hospital of Qatar as the Medical Director of Sidra Medicine Child Advocacy Program where he is promoting the welfare and safety of children, Dr Jilani, MD (Pediatrics) and FRCPC (London), dwelt at length on the issue of exam-related stress in an exclusive interview with **Qatar Tribune**. Excerpts:

Qs: These are times of stress for the students of grades X and XII who are writing their Board exams currently. How big a challenge is the stress levels that accompany the process of exams?

A: It is very common, widely prevalent across cultures. While some stress or anxiety is healthy and drives students to put in more

effort which helps them perform well, some students get too stressed or tense that results in poorer outcomes. Suicide rates among teens and young adults have shown an increased trends in the months leading up to exams or soon after while waiting for results.

How important is it for parents and teachers to keep tabs on the stress-related issues of students?

Parents and teachers should provide extra support and not put extra pressure on students during these stressful times. They should watch for signs of stress on their wards for example lack of sleep, excessive eating or loss of appetite, getting moody or cranky, getting isolated, and not enjoying things they used to enjoy previously.

What's your advice to parents and students in this scenario?

Keeping calm is important. Parents should explain to their children that while doing well in exam is important, it is not everything. Exam or test should

be taken just an assessment of the learning that had taken place over the year. They should not set unrealistic expectations or compare their performance with other children. Sometimes fear of inability to fulfill parents' expectations adds to the stress.

Students are advised to make a set routine for revision and look after themselves well while they spend time on studies. Healthy eating, having adequate sleep (at least 8 hours), taking breaks in between and relaxing helps reduce the anxiety and stress. Students should focus on putting their best efforts and not worry too much about what if results or grades were not as they expected.

Could you throw light on this issue from the perspective of international best practices?

Most psychologists recommend the importance of keeping the worries into perspective and not

taking any exam as be-all and end-all. The simple measures of making a revision plan, taking breaks for 10 minutes after about 90 min of studying, sleeping at least 8 hours, eating healthy, and exercise and talking to friends and family helps. Parents should watch for signs of stress as enumerated earlier and get timely help by talking to a school counselor or mental health professional.

Listening to music, yoga and relaxation exercise where students are taught to take slow breath through the nose while counting 1 to 5 and then holding it for 2 seconds and then exhaling through their pursed lip slowly again counting till 5, and repeating this exercise 4-5 a day. Children who panic easily find this breathing exercise quite helpful in reducing the stress.

How do you see this problem as a doctor?

I am a Pediatric Consultant in Emergency department as well as Medical Director for Sidra Child Advocacy Program. We see the devastating effects of the stress with children coming to Emergency department with attempted overdose, self-harm, depression or outright suicidal attempt. Often there is stress related to educational achievement and fear of being unable to fulfill parents' expectations making them feel sad and miserable. Our role is to support the young persons and fami-

lies develop the right strategies to cope with the stress better. We work closely with our colleagues in the mental health department and our social workers to provide that support and counseling once they are medically stable.

Sometimes cases of unrealistic pressures from parents to do well is brought to our notice as psychological or emotional abuse.

Has the online system added to the stress and exam-related anxiety for students?

Definitely. Online education was forced on students during peak of COVID 19 and while it kept the learning going, it caused additional stress due to isolation, problems of navigating through the technology and absence of a teacher or instructor right there who they could look up to for help as happens in the classroom.

At Sidra, is there a section that deals with these kinds of challenges among young people?

Yes, if parents, teachers or students themselves feel that stress is getting too much then they should get professional help and discuss the fears and source of stress to a school counselor or Psychologist. Sidra Medicine has a dedicated Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service with trained and highly experienced professionals who could provide psychological assessment and support to the young persons.



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Dr Nadeem Jilani