

# Exam guide for parents

GCSEs, AS levels, A levels, T levels and VTQs





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# Introduction

## Parental support during exams

Exams mark an important moment in your child's education, and the support you offer during this time can have a powerful impact. Whether they are working towards GCSEs, AS levels, A levels, T levels or VTQs, your encouragement can help them feel confident, motivated and ready to do their best.

At Parentkind, we understand that exam season can feel just as challenging for parents and carers as it does for young people. You want to support your child in the right way, but it's not always easy to know how to help with revision, manage anxiety or think ahead to what comes next. This guide is here to support you every step of the way.

It's completely natural for parents to feel under pressure during this period, balancing the desire to do everything right with the realities of everyday family life

Inside, you'll find clear information about the exam process and what your child can expect, practical advice on supporting their learning and wellbeing during revision and exams and guidance on next steps beyond results day – whether that's further education, training or entering the world of work. We've also

included useful tips, a straightforward glossary and details of where to go for extra support if you need it.

Alongside this guide, we're proud to offer free webinars for parents, covering a wide range of topics designed to support your child's learning and wellbeing. These interactive sessions give you the opportunity to hear from experts, ask questions and connect with other parents and carers facing similar experiences. You can find out more on our website.

At Parentkind, we believe parents, carers and families are essential partners in education. Our mission is to empower you to play an active role in your child's learning journey, helping to improve their life chances and support them in building a positive future.

We wish you and your family every success during the exam season ahead.



Frank Young  
Chief Executive, Parentkind



# Preparing for exams and revising

With exams, the key to success is preparation. Here are some ways you can help your child to stay organised, all while supporting them as they get stuck into revision

## Mental health and wellbeing

### Do

- ✓ **Give them space.** As a parent, it can be hard to take a step back, especially during such an important time in their lives. But unless they specifically ask you for help, it's really important to trust your child and allow them to get on with things, otherwise you might add to the pressure they're already feeling.
- ✓ **Recognise stress triggers.** Knowing the signs of stress helps to anticipate problems, even when those feelings can't be avoided. Helping your child to understand this will strengthen their resilience and help them to recover quickly. Try asking them to write down their triggers and reflect on things that may be contributing to stress.
- ✓ **Put yourself in their shoes.** It's not always easy to remember how you felt when you were at school, but trying to empathise with your child's situation can help you understand what they might need, and help them feel listened to and supported.

### Don't

- ✗ **Add to the pressure.** Whatever their circumstances, young people generally care about their futures and want to do well at school and beyond. You'll often find they put enough pressure on themselves and adding more won't help them achieve better exam results.
- ✗ **Make comparisons.** We all have different strengths and weaknesses, so it's not useful to compare your child's academic abilities to that of their siblings, friends or even your own.
- ✗ **Forget your own mental health and wellbeing.** This is also a stressful time for you as a parent. Lead by example, acknowledge when you're feeling overwhelmed and be kind to yourself.

**20% of children**

have experienced exam-related stress

YoungMinds, the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health, have three top tips for looking after your child's wellbeing during exam time:

### 1 Ask what kind of support they would like from you.

It might be planning out a revision timetable, finding time for special activities or treats between exams or just being a listening ear when they need to talk.

**2 Support them to find a balance between studying and doing things they find enjoyable.** Make sure they're scheduling regular revision breaks and making time for fun and relaxing activities too.

**3 Set aside moments for spending time together and checking in.** This can be as simple as watching some TV or going for a walk. While you're doing something relaxing together, gently check in about how they're doing. If they're feeling overwhelmed, empathise with how hard it is and reassure them that it's normal to feel stressed. Keep reminding them that they only need to do their best and that you can work together on any problems they're having.

## A solid foundation for learning

When it comes to revision, never underestimate the power of good food, sleep and time spent away from the desk. If your child has a hobby, you should encourage them to keep up with it. A healthy balance is really important to avoid burnout and it might not be something your child knows how to do on their own.

A consistent routine at home can also help everyone feel at ease when life gets stressful. Being organised yourself is great, but encourage your child to take control and organise their own time too.

Build a positive learning environment by staying positive and proactive. Help your child plan a realistic revision timetable (not just one that reflects the amount of

revision they feel they ought to be doing) and tell them to ignore how their friends do things. Your child's revision should be all about their own needs.

Finally, lend an ear when your child needs it. They might want to let off some steam and figure things out verbally, so give them space to do so. You can have a positive impact on their stress levels simply by listening to their worries. If your child prefers to work things out alone, which is perfectly normal, you could share with them the **Ofqual guide to coping with exam pressure**.

### Get those zZzs in

Did you know teenagers need eight to ten hours of sleep a night? Sleep helps strengthen memory, so it's a really important part of revision!



## How the school or college can help with revision

The school should be your first port of call for revision advice and guidance. Having a good relationship with teachers (or at least knowing the best way to start a conversation) will make your child feel heard, and will help them to work out their revision needs. If you think the school or college is putting too much pressure on your child, it's okay to let them know. Get in touch and explain you'd like to talk through your concerns. The first point of contact will usually be your child's class teacher or form tutor. If you think it would be helpful, ask to speak to the SENCo or ALNCo, or a member of the pastoral care team as well – your child's teacher may suggest this anyway.

To find the best solution, it helps to be clear about what your concerns are. Make a list, keep a diary or ask your child to write a letter so it's in their words. Parents' evenings are another great opportunity to have a constructive discussion about the work or any feelings around it, but if you're worried, don't feel you have to wait until then.

## Food, glorious food!

Healthy snacks scientifically proven to keep those brain cogs whirring during revision sessions:

- Dark chocolate
- Berries
- Bananas
- Nuts and seeds
- Porridge



### Resources

For more helpful tips and guidance, check out this [exam time mental health and wellbeing guide for parents](#) from Young Minds.



# Taking exams

Preparing for an exam is more than studying, it is also about knowing what to expect on the day. Here are some key details to help you and your child navigate the exam process with confidence

## Exam timetable

Every student will get an individual timetable for exams and assessments from their school or college. It shows where and when the exams or assessments will take place, including when they'll need to arrive. Make sure your child checks it very carefully – if they think there are mistakes, there's a clash or they're unsure about something, they'll need to speak with their school as soon as possible.

To make sure no exams are forgotten about, it might be worthwhile putting a copy on the fridge or writing the dates on the family calendar. For most qualifications, there won't be

another opportunity to sit an exam or assessment until next year. So if your child misses it because they forgot about it, they won't get any marks for it or be able to take it on a different day. See [page 14](#) for more information on resits.

For some Vocational Technical Qualifications (VTQs), it may be possible to sit an exam or assessment at a later point in the year. The school or college will be able to let your child know if that's the case.



## GCSE, AS and A level exam date

GCSE, AS and A level exams will be held **between 7th May and 23rd June 2026**. Exam board timetables for the 2026 summer exams for GCSEs, AS and A levels can be found on the individual exam board websites.

## Save the date

There are two 'contingency' sessions scheduled for the morning and afternoon of 24th June 2026. Students must be available up to and including the contingency date, even if they do not have an exam scheduled

## VTQ exam dates

Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) and T levels take place throughout the year. The school or college will tell your child when their exams or assessments are scheduled. You can also find the dates on the exam board's website.

### If your child missed their exam...

...make sure they speak to their school or college as soon as possible.

## On the day of the exam

Your child's teachers will talk with them about what to expect during exams for many months before the big day, but here are a few things to keep in mind:

- The exam timetable not only shows when and where exams are taking place, but also the arrival time, so make sure to double (and triple) check this
- It's a good idea to have a list of the equipment allowed for each exam or assessment – for example, approved calculators that are only allowed in certain exams
- Only clear pencil cases can be taken into exams and if your child takes in a water bottle, the label must be removed
- When your child gets their exam paper, they should check it is the correct subject, date and tier
- If your child is unsure about anything during the exam, they should let the exam invigilator know immediately

## Malpractice

Students can be disqualified from their exam if they:

- Share answers
- Impersonate another student
- Leak exam papers or other assessment materials, or use leaked materials
- Swap scripts
- Use artificial intelligence (AI) inappropriately in non-exam assessments (e.g. chatbots)
- Smuggle information or take mobile phones or communication devices into exam halls

! Of the 5,025 penalties issued to students in 2025, 44.3% involved mobiles or other devices - make sure they leave their mobile phone in a secure place before starting their exam!

## If your child is unwell or hurt

They may be given 'special consideration' if your child is affected by a temporarily experienced illness, injury or some other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment. Special consideration is only for things that happen immediately before or during an exam or assessment.

To be eligible, your child must be fully prepared and have covered the whole course. They won't be eligible if they joined the class part way through, or if their education was disrupted.

Special consideration could mean:

- The way the assessment is taken is altered (for example,

if your child has a broken arm, someone could write their answers for them)

- A small number of extra marks are awarded if your child's exam performance is affected by temporary illness, injury or other unforeseen circumstance
- Your child is given a grade if they have to miss an exam or assessment, as long as they have completed at least one other exam or assessment for that qualification

If you think your child is eligible for special consideration, they should talk to their school or college.

## Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments, or access arrangements, are changes made to an exam or assessment, or to the way an exam or assessment is carried out, so students with a disability can demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.

This includes:

- Modified papers (e.g. large print or braille exam papers)
- Access to assistive software (e.g. voice recognition systems or computer readers)
- Access to a scribe or reader
- Changes to how the assessment is done (e.g. word-processing rather than hand-writing answers)
- Extra time to complete assessments

### Reminder!

Revision notes, phones and watches (analogue, digital or smart) cannot be taken into exams.

# Marking and grading

Grading is the process that determines how many marks are needed for each grade. Here is some insight into what happens after your child has taken their exam

## Marking

Exam boards recruit experienced assessors to mark their exams. They are usually a team of qualified teachers who have taught the subject they are marking.

Non-exam assessments, such as practical work or performances, can be marked by teachers in your child's school or college, visiting examiners or the exam board themselves.

It's the exam boards' job to make sure all assessors, including any teachers marking their own students' work, understand how to mark accurately and consistently.

### What if my child disagrees with their mark?

They'll need to speak to their school or college about it. If an assessment has been marked by their teacher, they can ask their school or college to review it before the marks are sent to the exam board.

**See the results day section** for more information.

## Grading

The exam boards work out how many marks are needed for each grade by reviewing the papers to see the quality of student work and all the available evidence before recommending grade boundaries.

For some VTQs, each assessment will be given a grade and these are combined at the end to give a final grade.

The number of marks needed for a grade is different every year because the exams are different every year. This keeps things fair and makes sure that it isn't easier or harder to get a particular grade from one year to the next.

## Good to know

The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed that students taking exams in 2026 and 2027 will not be expected to memorise all the usual formulae and equations in GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science. Students will be provided with support materials in the form of formulae and equation sheets, and the support materials will set out the formulae and equations that students must memorise in a normal year, as set out in the DfE's subject content. For more information, read the Ofqual student guide to exams and assessments in 2026: [gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-student-guide-to-exams-and-assessments-in-2026](https://gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-student-guide-to-exams-and-assessments-in-2026)





# Results day

Focused? Nervous? Excited? Or a mix of all three? Here are some tips on handling difficult conversations, how to prepare and what to expect on results day

## The waiting game

The wait between taking exams and finding out the results may take months, and it can be agonising. When it comes to supporting your child during this time, you know them best and how they're likely to react. If they want to talk to you about their worries, it's a perfect opportunity to ask them how they feel and what you can do to help. It's also a good time to talk about their options and offer reassurances. But if they don't come to you for support, try not to talk about results day too much. Some young people prefer not to talk about what's worrying them.

It's best not to downplay the results. We can all look back and see with hindsight that exam results are not the be-all and end-all, and lots of doors remain open for young people. But when you're the one going through it, it doesn't feel like that. Well-meaning efforts to put things into perspective can end up seeming like an attempt to belittle their experience and achievements.

You're probably going to feel the tension too! Remember, you're not alone – young people and their parents all across the country are going through the same wait. Talking to others in the same boat can help calm nerves.

## Results day dates

- 📅 **AS, A levels and T levels (taken in summer 2026):** Thursday 13th August 2026
- 📅 **Level 3 VTQs:** Thursday 13th August 2026
- 📅 **GCSEs (taken in summer 2026):** Thursday 20th August 2026
- 📅 **Level 2 and level 1/2 VTQs:** Thursday 20th August 2026
- 📅 **GCSEs (taken in November 2026):** January 2027

## What happens on the day

Your child will either get their results sent to them via email or will go to their school or college to pick them up. Their school will let them know more details.

## Some VTQ results are available throughout the year

You can find the dates on the exam board's website or the [VTQ Information Hub](#).

## Should I stay or should I go?

Ask your child if they want you to be with them when they get their results, and try not to be too upset if they want to be alone! It's a good idea to clear your diary if you can either way, just in case they change their mind.

## Have a Plan A...and a Plan B...and a Plan C...

Plan for the expected, the unexpected and everything in between. If your child has to stay in education to retake exams for example, be savvy about knowing how long they can access education before needing to pay tuition fees and accrue debts.

## Welcome to adulthood

While there's already a lot of pressure on parents to help their child work out their options, it's also a huge adjustment for young people, especially if they have just turned 18 and are now an adult. If they go into higher education, will they be living away from home for the first time? Do they know how to manage their finances and budget for essentials? Can they prepare meals? Will they be able to find their way around a large



town or busy city? If you won't be there on a daily basis for them, then they need to know the basics of standing on their own two feet, and worldly wisdom doesn't always follow automatically from high academic success.

## Don't compare or compete

Focus on how your child has done, not their friends or siblings, and how they are feeling about their future.

Do your own research on alternative subjects, courses, earn while you learn programmes (e.g. apprenticeships) or sixth forms and colleges they might consider applying for. But keep in mind it's their future, not yours, so don't push them unless you're sure it's towards something they want to do.

**Keep in touch.** Make sure you know who to call at the school for advice or support. If your child had a conditional place at a college or university, have a contact number to hand – you can often negotiate on a lower grade.

## If your child doesn't get the result they wanted

**Perspective.** It's very important to remember that it's not the end of the world, even though it may feel like it for your child. There will be other options. They are at the start of their lives, with so many doors still open to them.

**Be calm.** Stay as calm and positive as possible, particularly in the initial aftermath when emotions will be running high.

Your child may feel a sense of failure if their results are not as good as they had hoped, so now more than ever they will need to hear that they are loved and everything is going to be okay.

**Plan B.** Being prepared for different outcomes and knowing what the options are will be very useful.



## Need advice?

The UCAS exam results helpline is for parents as well as teens, offering careers advice and support. Call them on 0371 468 0468 or [visit their website](#) for expert guidance.



# Reviews and appeals

If your child feels their results are not accurate, they should speak to their school or college. If the school or college agrees, they'll ask the exam board to hold a review

Step 1

The school/college requests reviews of marking and the exam board checks to see if any errors have been made

Step 2

If the school/college believes there is still an error, an appeal is made, which is considered by the exam board

Step 4

If the school/college disagrees they can apply to Ofqual's exam procedures review service: [www.gov.uk/guidance/exam-procedures-review-service](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/exam-procedures-review-service)

Step 3

If the school/college is still unsatisfied, they can request a hearing

## Priority review of marking

The school or college can ask the exam board to prioritise your child's review of marking if the result is needed quickly to get a higher or further education place. Exam boards aim to complete priority reviews by **3rd September**. For more information, read the guidance on [Post-Results Services - JCQ](#), Joint Council for Qualifications.

## Fees

Be aware that you may have to pay a fee if you ask for a review and there has not been an error.



*At each stage of the review of marking process, if the exam board agrees that an error had taken place, then they can change the mark. If the mark changes, the overall grade may also change. The new grade could be higher or lower than it was.*





# Resits


If your child thinks they can get better grades with more preparation, they may want to resit their exams. They can retake any exam as many times as they want.

But if they fail an exam they don't have to retake it, especially if it doesn't have an impact on their future goals. The only subjects they have to continue to study are GCSE English and maths if they're under 18 and did not get at least a grade 4 in that subject. Depending on the circumstances, they may be eligible to take **functional skills qualifications** instead.

## When will resits take place?

 **GCSEs** – English language and maths can be retaken in the autumn, usually in November with the results given in January. For all other subjects, the exams need to be taken the following year during the usual exam period. There may be other options that are better suited to your child, such as rethinking their further education subjects or route to qualifications. Most schools and colleges will allow students to study GCSEs alongside their A levels, so they can progress in the usual way.

 **A levels** – Students can take Year 13 again. This can involve additional studying, tutoring or revision courses.

 **VTQs** – Some assessments take place throughout the year. Check with the school or college about the next available date.



## Resit fees

There may be a fee to pay to retake exams, but this will be made clear before your child enrolls. For more information, speak to the school or college.

Resources such as the [National Careers Service](#) exam results helpline can offer guidance to both children and their parents. Operators can help with everything from resits, retakes, skills and apprenticeships to finding a job, gap years and funding. Have a pen and paper handy for jotting down options.



# Glossary

## A levels – Advanced level

Also known as General Certificates of Education, the A level is a qualification offered by exam boards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is the main pre-university qualification. It takes two years to complete.

## AS levels – Advanced Subsidiary level

An optional qualification studied after GCSEs. It is a standalone qualification and allows students to study a fourth subject on top of the three A levels they have chosen. It takes a year to complete.

## DfE – Department for Education

The Department for Education is responsible for curriculum, funding and accountability requirements for schools and colleges in England. It also sets the subject content for GCSEs, AS and A levels and awards T Level certificates. The Welsh equivalent is the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (Yr Adran Addysg a Sgiliau) and the Northern Ireland equivalent is the Department of Education NI. Qualifications Scotland (formerly the Scottish Qualifications Authority or SQA) is the national qualifications and awards body.

## Exam boards

Also known as awarding bodies or organisations, exam boards develop and award GCSEs, AS and A levels based on the subject content set out by the Department for Education, and following Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition, subject level and qualification level conditions. There are four exam boards recognised by Ofqual that award GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England:

- AQA
- OCR
- Pearson
- WJEC Eduqas

## GCSE – General Certificates of Secondary Education

GCSEs are the main qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland taken by 14 to 16-year-olds in schools and colleges, but are open to anyone. They are available in a range of subjects and can be studied alongside other qualifications.

## Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

works with employers to develop, approve, review and revise apprenticeships and technical qualifications. This includes the subject content of the Technical Qualification within a T Level.

## Ofqual – The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

Ofqual regulates awarding organisations that design, deliver and award qualifications and apprenticeship assessments in England. They make sure qualifications are fit for purpose, valid and delivered securely.

## Qualification types

Regulated qualifications are classified into the different types below:

- Advanced Extension Award
- English for Speakers of Other Languages
- Functional Skills
- Digital Functional Skills
- GCE A level
- GCE AS level
- GCSE (9 to 1)
- Project
- End-Point Assessment
- Essential Digital Skills
- Technical Qualification
- Other Vocational Qualifications

## UCAS – The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

An independent charity and the UK's shared admissions service for higher education. They support young people making post-18 choices, as well as mature learners, to help them progress their education to university, college or a degree apprenticeship.

## Vocational and technical qualifications

Qualifications that are not 'general'. These are normally more vocation-focused, and can include qualifications designed to support the development of practical skills in English, maths and ICT (functional skills qualifications) as well as technical, professional or occupational qualifications.

# Useful contacts and resources

## UCAS

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent charity, and the UK's shared admissions service for higher education.

For any questions about higher education applications and admissions, you should contact the relevant institution directly.

**Telephone: 0371 468 0 468**

**Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 6pm**

## The National Careers Service

The National Careers Service provides free and impartial careers advice, information and guidance including T Levels and VTQs. The service is available to anyone aged 13+.

**Telephone: 0800 100 900**

**Lines are open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 5pm on Saturdays. Calls are free from landlines and most mobile numbers.**

## Complete University Guide

The Complete University Guide provide independent, easy-to-understand university league tables and rankings with key information for university research. Click the link above to read their results day stress and mental health guide.

## Talking Futures

Talking Futures help parents to talk about the future with their children. Click the link above to read their parents' toolkit for career conversations.

## Young Minds

Young Minds is a charity working to improve emotional wellbeing and mental health amongst children and young people. They also support parents and carers who are concerned about their child or young person's mental health. Their Parents Helpline provides detailed advice and information, emotional support and signposting.

**Telephone: 0808 802 5544**

**Lines are open Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm**

## Mind

Mind is a charity providing mental health support for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

## CYPMHS

Children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) are services that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their mental health or wellbeing.

# About Parentkind

Parentkind is on a mission to enrich the educational experience for every child - both at home and at school. We empower anyone with parental or educational responsibility with the knowledge, ideas and resources to give young people the very best start in life. As one of the largest federated charities in the UK, Parentkind has a network of 23,500 Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), parent councils and schools, and mobilises more than 100,000 volunteers to raise vital funds for schools.