# SURVIVING THE STRESSFUL STUDY SEASON

You may be a student writing your own end of year exam or a parent “experiencing” school all over again because your child is writing the ever so important final exam. Irrespective, the whole family is affected by the stress of studying for an exam. The end of the year is drawing near, and that means final exams are looming. How can you give yourself an edge this time around? The most important thing you can do is give yourself plenty of time to prepare. Then follow this simple plan:

**Create a Study Timetable**

Plan your studying by creating a timetable that is realistic and can be followed. Be sure that it allows enough time to study for each of your exams. You may have 2 exams on the same day, so you will need to plan ahead and be well prepared for both exams. Plan your time. Block specific hours in your timetable to study for each subject's exam. Limit the study sessions to 50 minutes to an hour. Marathon study sessions can be unproductive because there is a limit to how long the brain can focus on the same material. If the mind starts wandering, it is telling you that it is tired and it is time for a break. Take a walk, have a snack or just relax for 15 minutes, and take your mind off the studies completely.

**STUDY LOCATION**

Choose a quiet place where you can sit and concentrate without any interruptions. Ensure that your cell phone and computer are switched off as this can be a distraction and you will lose focus. Be calm, sit comfortably in an uncluttered place with all your stationery at hand when you are studying. Ideally you should not sit on the bed as this is where your mind and body are trained to sleep. There should be proper ventilation, so open the windows take in the fresh air and stay awake. Studying in the same spot also helps with remembering during the exam. Your memory is triggered by the location.

**Revise PAST YEAR PAPERS**

Add revision sessions to your study timetable. Revisit your study plan and cut back on activities to free up more study time. Tests that have been returned can be a good resource when preparing for the final exam. Look at the tests to get a feel for the types of questions that have been asked and the expected answer.

If you are in matric, USE PAST PAPERS! Your teachers will have copies of past year papers. If you have access to the Internet you can obtain these papers by logging on to **www.education.gov.za**. Practice the paper by doing the questions yourself under exam conditions at home (time yourself on each question). Do these papers carefully and mark them yourself from the model answer or memo which can be obtained from the above-mentioned website.

Make notes about the areas where you feel you are the weakest, so you can concentrate on those chapters.

**Form Study Groups**

Study groups are a good idea all of the time, but they are particularly effective when studying for the final exam. Assign each person in the study group a section of the course to review and “teach” to the others. Each person should develop possible test questions to cover their section. Ensure that the study session is structured so that there isn’t idle chat and deviations from the study program. Revise the work discussed on your own to determine if you do understand the section.

**RELAX**

Final exam time does NOT mean panic time! Eat well, get plenty of sleep, and relax. You will be surprised to find that you have remembered more than you think! Be sure to allow enough time to sleep, exercise, and eat well. If you take care of your body, your body will take care of your mind! Give your brain fuel to keep it going. Snack at regular intervals with nutritious food like nuts, fruit and away from the fizzy drinks and crisps. The better you feed your brain, the better you can think. Stick to your timetable!

**WIDEN YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

Expand your knowledge by joining a revision programme eg. Star Schools or one that is arranged at your school or local community hall. These programmes usually cover the whole year’s syllabus within a few hours and it is a good way revising all your work. It also can be very informative listening to another voice teaching things in a “different” way to your teacher. Do not depend on the programme for studying but rather revision or clarification of things that you do not understand. This also allows one to network and realise that you are not alone trying to survive the stressful period of studying. This exposure will assist you in understanding issues and will give you more confidence in answering questions in exams which require you to substantiate your opinions.

**REFINE YOUR EXAM TECHNIQUE**

You have three hours to complete a year-end Grade 12 examination. The time passes very quickly in an exam.

When you revise, choose questions that will extend you in your weaker areas. Use the time allocations provided in the question to judge whether you are completing the question in the time available.

Learn from Tiger Woods. Tiger Woods did not get so good at Golf without many hours of practice. He also extends himself in each and every practice session. In practices, he has been known to push his golf ball into the sand in a bunker and then try to hit it out. He knows that if he can get this right in a practice he will have a better chance of getting it right under the pressure of a Golf championship event. There is no point in practicing the easy shots all the time.

In any exam, there will be easy parts and more challenging parts within each question. Do not panic, but do not waste time. If you do not complete all the questions, you will be denying yourself the opportunity to earn the easy marks. The better you know you work, the quicker you will be able to finish the paper. Use highlighters and underline key words and phrases.

**FAMILY SUPPORT**

The weather is fantastic and everyone around you is having fun and enjoying the outdoors but you have to sit and study. Parents need to support their children by not hosting parties and get-togethers as these can be a distraction from studying. Try to organise these events after the exam so that the entire family can celebrate together and with all the effort put into studying everyone will have reason to celebrate.

Parents need to be supportive by talking to their children regarding how they feel and how they are coping. Be more understanding and help with the chores that your child normally does. Help your child face the stress and challenge of studying for an exam. Be involved in your child’s life, offer to listen to your child’s explanations, or help to explain what they do not understand, or go over the notes with them. In this way, your child is not feeling alone and you are supporting them. Encourage your child when they are feeling depressed, anxious and overwhelmed by the exam. Take a cup of tea or snack to the room when they are studying and be involved in their lives.

Remember that you will reap the rewards of the effort that you put into preparing for the exams. Good luck with the exams!