

Mindfulness Monthly



Issue 18: May 2025

Welcome to the May edition of 'Mindfulness Monthly'. With this month seeing the start of the 2025 GCSE exam season, we are focusing a lot of time in this edition looking at how you can support your child. We'll also be learning more about some of our fantastic Thamesmead colleagues.

Managing the demands of exams

As GCSE exams approach, it's natural for teenagers to feel the pressure — and for parents to wonder how best to support them. While we can't sit the exams for them, there's a lot we *can* do to help them feel more prepared, less stressed, and fully supported at home. The article below features some top tips that may be useful.

Create a calm and productive study environment:

A tidy, quiet space makes a huge difference. Try to provide a dedicated area where your child can revise without distractions — ideally away from TVs, phones, or younger siblings. Little things like good lighting, comfortable seating, and having all of their materials close by can really boost focus. Please do let the pastoral team in school know if this is an issue as we may be able to help.

Help them plan a balanced revision schedule:

Sit down together to create a realistic revision timetable. This gives structure and helps avoid last-minute cramming. Make sure they include regular breaks, time to relax, and enough sleep. A good rule of thumb: short, focused revision sessions with breaks in between are far more effective than hours of straight study. The tips offered to Year 11 in their Revision Techniques sessions with Mrs Miller may be useful here.

Encourage healthy habits:

Supporting your child's well-being is just as important as helping them revise. Encourage them to aim for 8–10 hours a night. Sleep helps the brain process and retain information. Provide healthy snacks and meals to keep energy and focus up. Encourage them to exercise - even a short daily walk can reduce stress and boost concentration.

Offer emotional support (not pressure):

GCSEs can be a stressful time, so a listening ear goes a long way. Let your teen know it's okay to feel overwhelmed, and that you're proud of the effort they're putting in, not just the results. Avoid comparisons with others and try to keep things in perspective. Your calm presence can be a steadying force.

Get involved – if they want you to:

Some teens like a bit of hands-on support. As a result you could offer to; test them with flashcards or past paper questions; help break down big topics into smaller chunks; talk through tricky concepts with them. If they'd rather go solo, that's okay too. Respecting their independence builds confidence and self-motivation. As noted before, Mrs Miller's revision sessions offered some good tips here.

Be alert to stress and burnout:

Look out for signs like changes in mood, sleep problems, or avoiding revision altogether. If you're concerned, have a gentle conversation and consider speaking with school staff (such as tutors or subject teachers). Mental health matters — and there's no shame in needing support.

Final thoughts:

GCSEs are important, but they're not everything. What matters most is that your teen feels supported, understood, and empowered to do their best — whatever that looks like for them. With your encouragement, calm presence, and a few practical strategies, you can help make this exam season a little less stressful and a lot more manageable.

The following websites linked below offer further guidance if you would like it;

<https://www.annafreud.org/resources/children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing/self-care/revision/#:~:text=A%20good%20way%20of%20achieving,if%20you%20feel%20worn%20out>
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/exam-stress/>
<https://www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/feelings-and-experiences/exam-stress/>
<https://www.childline.org.uk/get-involved/articles/five-ways-cope-revision-stress/>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z8dw239>
https://www.place2be.org.uk/exams?gad_source=1&gclid=EALalQobChMI_8DDpLbfjAMVPodQBh2ZojqoEAAYASAAEgKpMMPD_BwE

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators MANAGING EXAM STRESS

At some point in their education, children are almost certain to encounter exam stress, which can cast a shadow over their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Mental health charity YoungMinds estimate that a staggering 87% of pupils suffer from exam stress – highlighting the urgent need to minimise its impact on children's health and happiness.

1 PRACTISE WORKLOAD WISDOM

The build up to exam season is such a busy and pressurised time in a child's education that it can be difficult for youngsters to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Encourage them to consider whether their current workload is realistic and allows them sufficient time to relax and recharge. Work with them in crafting a revision timetable that's manageable and includes breaks and occasional days off.

2 ADVISE CLEARING THE CLUTTER

A disorganised work environment is proven to negatively affect our ability to focus, as well as our emotional state. Encourage children to keep their desk, notes and revision materials tidy – creating a dedicated, well-kept study space to promote maximum focus. Foster their creativity by suggesting they incorporate vibrant colours, mind maps and even quirky drawings into their revision notes.

3 MASTER THE MATERIALS TOGETHER

Revision seems far harder when a child is uncertain where to begin or what sources to consult. Support them in confirming revision materials with their various teachers – emphasising the importance of gathering a range of resources to get a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Feeling more prepared should nurture the child's confidence and help to dispel some of their anxiety.

4 RECOMMEND CREATIVE NOTE-TAKING

Writing out notes in full – rather than simply bullet pointing – can be a strong start to a child's revision. Reinforce this idea, encouraging the use of flashcards (featuring shorter versions of previously taken notes) for effective repetition and memorisation. Discuss the power of regularly reviewing notes to help them stay in the child's memory.

5 USE VISUAL AIDS AND MNEMONICS

Encourage the use of visual aids like videos and sticky notes to enhance learning. Some children find these resources far more useful than simply reading their notes as written. Explore creating mnemonics for a fun and effective study approach – and it's also worth noting that the strategic use of colours is a proven means of triggering recall during exams.

6 GATHER A 'TECH TOOLKIT'

Technology can be a huge advantage in exam prep. Educational YouTube channels and revision websites like BBC Bitesize can be immensely powerful resources for helping children to expand and retain their knowledge. You could also recommend the use of flashcard apps and educational podcasts for revision and reminders when young people are on the go.

7 KEEP IT FUN

Revision tends to go far more smoothly if children are having fun in the process. Injecting some humour into their notes, for instance, can make details more memorable – as can relating information to their real-life experiences. Try to encourage a variety of study methods, such as incorporating physical activity (even simply taking a walk) into their revision routine.

8 SUGGEST ACTIVE REVISION STRATEGIES

Make sure children are aware of different study techniques. You could emphasise the effectiveness of spaced repetition by reviewing material regularly over time to reinforce learning and improve retention. Discuss the benefits of active recall methods – such as self-testing or explaining a concept aloud – in identifying where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

9 ENCOURAGE A POSITIVE MINDSET

It can be easy for children's thoughts to fall into a downward spiral when they're stressed about exams. Try to foster a growth mindset by emphasising the importance of giving it all rather than aiming for complete perfection. Positive self-talk and the use of affirmations can build confidence and reduce anxiety, while visualising success and setting realistic goals can help them stay motivated and focused.

10 HELP THEM TO SEIZE THE DAY

There are lots of things children can do on the day of their exam to reduce stress and increase their focus. Talk them through some helpful exam-day strategies – such as arriving early, reading the instructions and the questions carefully, and pacing themselves during the test. Suggest some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or visualisation, to help them manage any nerves before and during the exam.

Meet Our Expert

Minds Ahead design and deliver the UK's only specialist postgraduate mental health qualifications. Winner of the Social Enterprise UK: 'One to Watch' award, the charity provides training and support to education organisations and local authorities. This guide has been written by Adam Gillett – a learning and development specialist who is also Associate Vice-Principal for Personal Development at Penistone Grammar School.



WakeUp
Wednesday

The
National
College

Nerves are normal

During the last week of April Mr Todd delivered assemblies to Years 7-10 about normalising the conversation regarding mental health. As part of the assembly, he spoke to the students about nerves and how they are a normal part of life. Nerves can make us feel anxious, but they do not necessarily mean that we have anxiety. Mr Todd added that we *should* be nervous about some things (exams, performances, playing in teams and trying new things, etc...) – our body wants us to perform well so we should embrace these feelings. Please could we ask that you echo this message at home. If you would like to see a copy of the assembly, please do email Mr Todd on d.todd@thamesmead.surrey.sch.uk and he would be happy to send it on.

Thamesmead staff profiles

As with previous editions, every month we learn more about some of our colleagues in school. This month we'll learn more about the amazing Mr Cowley and Mrs Newling-Ward;

What is your role at Thamesmead?

I am the Head of Year 8, and teacher of Physical Education.

How long have you worked at Thamesmead?

I have worked at Thamesmead for nearly 6 years.

Have you had other careers prior to working at Thamesmead?

Prior to teaching at Thamesmead, I taught in another secondary school and was Head of Boys PE, and was the DofE Coordinator. Before I got into teaching I worked as a part time sports coach, going into primary schools in Richmond Borough (when I was 18, whilst I was at college) through to when I was 20 (at university).

What do you do to support with your own mental health?

I love all facets of sport (participating and spectating). I currently still play cricket, and frequently watch West Ham live. During the weekends I enjoy taking my daughter to her football club on a Saturday morning, and going swimming with her on a Sunday. Making time to do things as a family is really important to me. Lastly, I have an allotment in Walton and love growing home produce that we are able to utilise in the kitchen, and particularly have a passion for growing chillies and making condiments (hot sauces, pickled vegetables and chutneys).



Mr Cowley

What is your role at Thamesmead?

I'm fortunate to be the Pastoral Manager for Year 7, supporting students as they settle into secondary school life and helping them thrive both emotionally and academically.

How long have you worked at Thamesmead?

I joined Thamesmead in September and have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the community since then.

Have you had other careers prior to working at Thamesmead?

Yes, I started my career as a nutritionist and spent 20 years as a lecturer at St Mary's University, where I also directed the nutrition programme. After two decades, I felt ready for a new direction. I took time out to volunteer at a homeless shelter and with other organisations such as supporting victims of trafficking—experiences that deepened my passion for helping others. This eventually led me into the world of SEN and pastoral care. I worked at a number of schools before finding a fulfilling role at Twickenham School, where I spent five years, including as Acting SENCo and then in a safeguarding role.

What do you do to support with your own mental health?

Spending time with my family is essential—I have an energetic five-year-old and a lovable Maltese poodle who both enjoy being outdoors, especially on sunny days. I also find peace in my garden; it's my little sanctuary. When I get home from work, my family knows I need five minutes of quiet time (often waiting in the car) before I dive into the usual flurry of questions and activity!



Mrs Newling-Ward

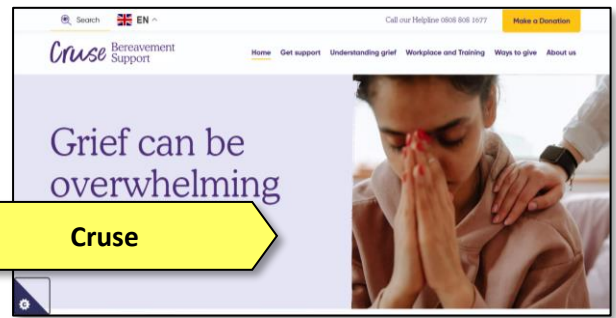
Supporting students that have suffered a bereavement

Over recent weeks we have been informed about a number of families in our community who have experienced loss and bereavement. During this very sad time we would like to offer some support where we can. To ensure we provide the best possible support for our students, we are considering keeping a confidential record of those who have suffered a loss. This will allow us to offer support on key dates and anniversaries. If you feel comfortable sharing any details with us, please email Mr. Todd so we can keep this information confidential and provide the necessary support.

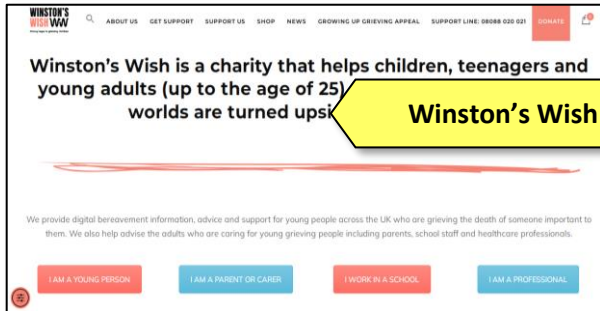
If you are currently working through grief as a family, there are a number of amazing resources that may be useful, and these have been copied below should you wish to take a look. As always, if you are viewing this newsletter electronically, the screen shots below are hyperlinked. If you are reading a physical copy, you can simply type the name of the organisation into your search engine;



Child Bereavement UK



Cruse



Winston's Wish



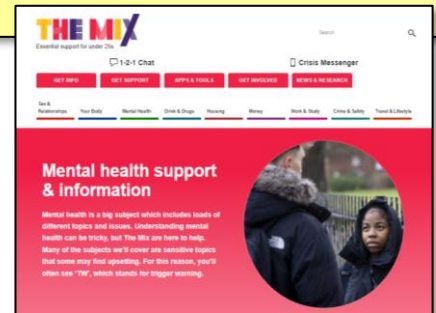
Mind

Website recommendation of the month

The Mix

(<https://www.themix.org.uk/mental-health>)

The Mix is a UK charity that provides free, confidential, and anonymous support to young people under 25, offering a range of services including online communities, a helpline, counselling, and crisis support. They focus on addressing a wide range of issues, from mental health and money problems to homelessness, jobs, and relationships.



Celebrating 'Mental Health Awareness Week'

Mental Health Awareness Week takes place from 12th May – 18th May and is run by the Mental Health Foundation. This year's theme is 'Community', and it will celebrate the power and importance of community. To support the cause, we will be running a range of tutor activities throughout the week. Please do ask your child about the activities during the week – hopefully they will be able to share a lot of information with you.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK
12-18 MAY 2025

Well-Being Quote:

"Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."

Abraham Lincoln

Meaningful May 2025

MONDAY



5 Let someone know how much they mean to you and why

12 Listen to a favourite piece of music and remember what it means to you

19 Reflect on what makes you feel valued and purposeful

26 Remember an event in your life that was really meaningful

TUESDAY



6 Look for people doing good and reasons to be cheerful

13 Find out about the values or traditions of another culture

20 Share photos of 3 things you find meaningful or memorable

27 Focus on how your actions make a difference for others

WEDNESDAY



7 Make a list of what matters most to you and why

14 Get outside and notice the beauty in nature

21 Look up at the sky. Remember we are all part of something bigger

28 Do something special and revisit it in your memory tonight

THURSDAY

1 Do something kind for someone you really care about

8 Set yourself a kindness mission to help others today

15 Do something to contribute to your local community

22 Find a way to help a project or charity you care about

29 Today do something to show care for the natural world

FRIDAY

2 Focus on what you can do rather than what you can't do

9 What values are important to you? Find ways to use them today

16 Show your gratitude to people who are helping to make things better

23 Recall three things you've done that you are proud of

30 Share a quote you find inspiring to give others a boost

SATURDAY

3 Take a step towards an important goal, however small

10 Be grateful for the little things, even in difficult times

17 Find a way to make what you do today meaningful

24 Make choices that have a positive impact for others today

31 Find three reasons to be hopeful about the future

SUNDAY

4 Send your friend a photo from a time you enjoyed together

11 Look around for things that bring you a sense of awe and wonder

18 Send a hand-written note to someone you care about

25 Ask someone else what matters most to them and why



ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

Happier · Kinder · Together