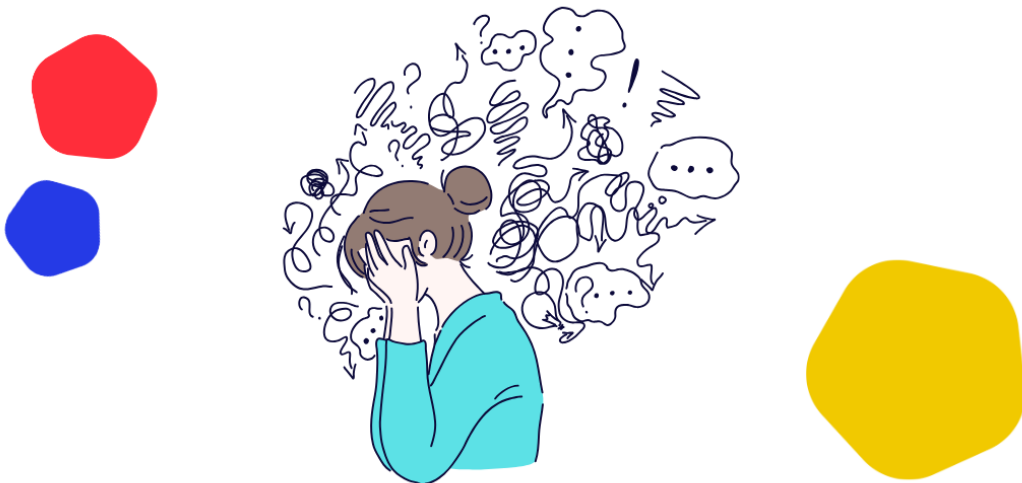


Exam season affects every student differently. For some it sharpens their focus. For others it is the most overwhelming time of their school life. Corridors that were buzzing with energy in September can feel very different by May. For every student who channels the pressure into focus, there is another quietly falling apart behind a composed exterior and you would not always know it from looking at them.

The truth is that for many students, the adults they see every day at school or college are the first people they feel able to talk to. Not parents, not friends. You. And when a student does find the courage to say "I'm really struggling," the response they get in that moment can shape whether they open up further or shut down entirely.

So what do you actually say? And just as importantly, how do you say it? Positively You have pulled together some practical guidance on exactly that and hope it is genuinely useful.



Part one: How to show up in that first conversation

Before you say anything, know this: the most powerful thing you can do is not offer advice. It is to make the student feel like what they are going through actually matters to you.

Resist the urge to reassure too quickly. "You'll be fine" is kind but it tends to close the conversation down rather than open it up. Instead, lead with acknowledgement. Something as simple as "that makes complete sense, this is a lot of pressure" signals that you are not brushing them off. From there, step away from the desk if you can, sit beside them rather than across from them and ask something open: "What is feeling most overwhelming right now?" Then genuinely wait. Students often need a moment to find the words and that silence is worth holding.

It is also worth being clear with yourself about where your role ends. If what you are hearing feels beyond exam nerves, a warm and confident handover to pastoral support is exactly the right move. "I want to make sure you get the right support for this" lands very differently to "you need to go and speak to someone else."

Part two: The practical tools worth sharing

Once the conversation is open and the student feels heard, this is where you can offer something concrete. Keep it to one or two things. A student who is already overwhelmed does not need a five-point plan.

Help them sort their worries. Ask them to think about which of their concerns they can actually do something about and which are outside their control entirely. This one exercise can shift a student from feeling buried under everything to having a clearer sense of where to put their energy.

Introduce the word "yet." When a student says "I'm just not good at this," challenge it gently with a single word. "Yet." It sounds small but consistently shifting language from fixed ("I can't") to growth ("I can't yet") genuinely changes how students relate to difficulty over time.

Reframe what stress actually is. Many students interpret feeling stressed as a sign they are going to fail. Help them see it differently. Stress is the body responding to something it cares about. A certain amount of it is normal and even useful. It is when it feels constant and unmanageable that it needs attention and that distinction alone can take some of the fear out of feeling anxious.

Make sleep sound like revision. Students will tune out general wellness advice but they tend to listen when you frame it in terms of results. Poor sleep directly

impairs the brain's ability to consolidate memory. A student who revises until midnight and sleeps badly is very likely retaining less than one who stops earlier and gets a full night. Put it that way and suddenly an early night feels like a smart exam strategy.