

Cheltenham Girls' High School

Supporting Students and Families in the HSC years of schooling



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Introduction

The HSC years of schooling are a time of change for many young people. Students are managing other life pressures as well as their studies. These pressures include developing positive interpersonal relationships, working in part time jobs, making decisions about their futures and coping with family interactions.

Recent studies of mental health in young people have found that mid to late adolescence and young adulthood are periods which see a general increase in the incidence of mental health problems. The most common mental health problems during this time are depression, anxiety and substance abuse.

Students' stress levels may contribute to these problems.

Keeping Things in Perspective

The final years of schooling can be stressful for parents or carers as well as for students. You should be careful not to get too anxious yourself. Try to avoid putting your own anxieties about your daughter's future onto her.

Most young people cope well. For some, however, the pressure and expectation to do well can be harmful. For parents or carers it can be difficult to find a balance between being supportive and being over-involved.

It can help to know that the HSC no longer gives results by comparing your daughter with other students. The HSC

reports how they are achieving when compared with a set of standards.

Encourage your daughter to concentrate on mastering the standards rather than competing with others.

It can also be helpful to remember that employers look for more than academic skills.

They want an employee who can communicate well, work well in a team and remain optimistic under pressure. These skills are developed both at school and in students' life outside school.

You should remind your daughter of all the useful skills she has already learned in this way.

How to help

You can help by encouraging your daughter to have realistic expectations. Help her to remain open to the wide range of options for further education and careers available after the HSC.

Be quietly supportive and available to listen. Let her know that you have confidence in her ability.

Re-assure her that:

- Your affection and concern is not dependent on how well she does in an exam
- There is life after the HSC and it can be good whatever her results.

Alternative pathways

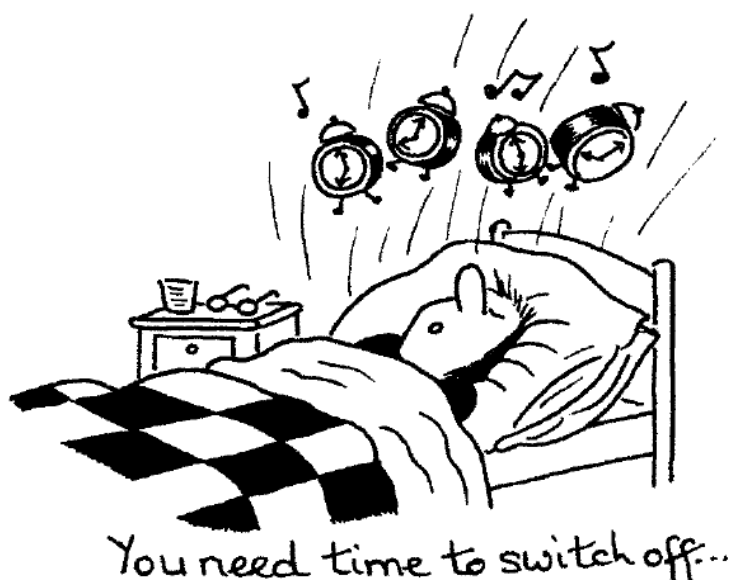
There are different pathways to the HSC. If things are not going well at school or there are family pressures, there are alternatives to full time attendance at school.

Students can study part time or study through TAFE. A pattern of study suited to the individual can usually be found.

Talk to the school counsellors or careers advisers for more information.

Preparing for the HSC

Preparing for the HSC is like preparing for a sports final or major performance. Plenty of sleep, healthy food, rest and recreation are essential in the period immediately before exams.



You need time to switch off...

Students need a balance between study, work, socialisation and sport. For these reasons, it is important for parents to discourage teenagers from doing nothing but study. They should be encouraged to avoid medications except on the advice of a doctor or pharmacist.

Organisation is the key to confidence.

Encourage your daughter to have a study plan that:

- uses exam and assessment results to set priorities
- reflects her teachers' advice
- covers subjects systematically
- includes time for work, leisure and other commitments.

Your daughter is now a young adult with her own ways of studying. These may be different to how you studied when you were at school but could be just as effective.

What does the school do?

Cheltenham Girls' High School runs a variety of programs during the HSC years and there are skilled people who can help.

Programs and people include the following:

- Year Advisers – assist students with choice of subjects, monitor their reports and provide a point of contact between the school and students' parents or carers.
- Careers Advisers – provide advice about a range of career options, tertiary studies and post-school training opportunities
- School counsellors – provide counselling for personal issues, assist students to clarify their goals and develop individual

study plans, as well as assisting them with exam anxiety. They refer students to other agencies concerned with the health and welfare of students when necessary and liaise with these agencies if appropriate

- Study Skills programs – are provided as part of each subject and sometimes through specific workshops

- Crossroads – a compulsory part of the personal development, health and physical education curriculum undertaken by all senior students, addresses a number of issues important to the personal development of older adolescents

- Extra-curricular and leadership opportunities – continue to be available for senior students in their HSC years.

Opportunities are provided to represent the school in sporting, community and cultural endeavours. These are satisfying in themselves, provide a break from more formal learning, and encourage the development of important interpersonal skills and confidence.

If you have any concerns contact the staff at school sooner rather than later.

Stress

Some stress is unavoidable and is normal for us all. Stress is a part of life and some students thrive on it. It motivates them to do their best.

You should nevertheless monitor your daughter's stress level to see if it is rising to a level which she is no longer able to handle. No one sign by itself necessarily suggests a problem but be alert for significant changes in her behaviour.

Indicators may include:

- Suddenly finding it more difficult than usual to concentrate
- Extreme irritability or sensitivity
- skipping meals
- Withdrawal from contact with others.



Try not to study for the last hour before the exam.

Students can log on to <http://www.reachout.com.au/quiz.asp?ei=4> and complete an online quiz which will assess stress levels. Also on the website is further information that students can use to deal with stress levels which are adversely affecting them.

Seeking professional help

Signs of depression should not be ignored.

In addition to the above these can include:

- Continually looking sad and talking sadly
- Negative self talk (putting themselves down)
- Talking about being unable to cope.

If you think your daughter is becoming too stressed, raise the matter with her, discuss options and, if the problem seems significant, encourage them to seek advice from her teacher, school counsellor or other supportive professional such as your family doctor. It may be appropriate for you to go with them to this person.

Helpful contacts

The New South Wales Board of Studies has a range of resources including sample papers and previous HSC exams complete with answers at

<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>

The BOSTES website, NSW Students Online, can also be accessed via this link: <http://studentonline.bos.nsw.edu.au/>. The website has been designed to support students through their HSC year and includes useful items such as Past HSC papers, Practice tasks, and syllabus documents. Students Online can be customised by each student so that it best meets the demands of their individual pattern of study.

There is also a dedicated parent section of this website: http://hsc.csu.edu.au/for_parents/

Please support your daughter by recommending both of these sites!