

4th Edition September 2014.  
Fully updated (incorporating  
Government changes, IGCSEs, Ebacc)

# GCSEs

## What can a parent do?



## 101 tips to ensure success

by Julie Casey M.Ed., C.Psychol.



**FutureLink**  
PUBLISHING

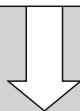
**4th Edition**  
September 2014

Fig 1

## Getting it right at each stage

### Stage 1

Learning the content first time round



#### **What can go wrong:**

- Not liking the teacher
- A lack of interest in the subject
- Finding the work difficult and giving up
- Deciding they are no good at the subject
- Taking advantage of less authoritative teachers to mess around
- Getting behind with homework
- Not bothering to attend lessons they don't like

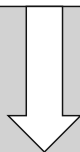
#### **Where to look for information:**

'Getting off to a good start' P19

'Motivating and encouraging persistence' P29

### Stage 2

Revision



#### **What can go wrong:**

- Not doing any!
- Leaving it all until the last minute
- Not having a plan
- Not being sure what to revise
- Being unrealistic about what can be done
- Revising the right things but in the wrong ways
- Becoming overwhelmed - not knowing where to start
- Not making the most of revision lessons and teachers at school

#### **Where to look for information:**

'The revision period' P33

'Motivating and encouraging persistence' P29

### Stage 3

The exam itself

#### **What can go wrong:**

- Getting the wrong time or place for the exam
- Arriving late
- Finding out they have revised for the wrong exam
- Being unfamiliar with the exam structure
- Not having the correct materials
- Panicking during the exam
- Answering the wrong sections or questions
- Not reading the questions carefully
- Spending too long on one section, and too little time on others

#### **Where to look for information:**

'The moment of truth - sitting the exams' P45

## GCSEs - What can a parent do? 101 tips to ensure success

<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	<b>Page No</b>
• The most common frustrations for parents	3
• Be in it to win it! The importance of attendance ...	4
• How can I make a difference?	5
• Good exam results – what is the secret?	10
 <b>Section 2: Getting it right at each stage</b>	
• Making the right GCSE choices	13
• Getting off to a good start	19
• Coping with homework, coursework and controlled assessments	23
• When the going gets tough... maintaining, motivating and encouraging persistence	29
• Revision	33
• The moment of truth – sitting the exams	45
• When it all goes pear-shaped – a troubleshooting guide	51
 <b>Section 3: What do I need to know?</b>	
• Tips on working in partnership with the school	56
o General tips	
o Finding out how your child is really doing	
o When to contact the school	
• Finding your way around the examination system: GCSEs, IGCSEs and the Ebacc	60
 <b>Section 4: Useful resources</b>	
• Subject information sheet (Samples 1 and 2)	64
• Four easy steps for making the best revision plan in the WORLD!	66
• Useful websites and stuff	72

# Section 1: Introduction

## The most common frustrations for parents

So what's the difference between a GCSE and an IGCSE? And what's this EBacc?

I didn't even do GCSEs - how can I help him?

There are a million websites to help but how do you know which are any good?

She's always panicked in exams - when I try to help her, it always ends in a slanging match. I encourage her but it always seems to end in me making her more stressed

He always leaves everything to the last minute. One moment he has all the time in the world; the next it's all stress and stropping because he's got an assessment tomorrow...

I don't understand all these controlled assessments, tiers and levels - it's completely different from when I was at school

She's always got an excuse - I don't know what to believe

I can't stand the arguments and stress when I tell him exams are important, and try to make him work - it always ends up with him saying it's his life and slamming the door

Surely she shouldn't be going out **again** when she's got exams coming up?



## Be in it to win it! The importance of attendance ...

**The single biggest favour you can do for your child is to send them to school EVERY day, on TIME!**

Well, my child's got a 90% attendance record – that seems pretty good to me!

90% attendance means that your child is missing **half a day** of lessons every week!

In a single year this would mean your child has missed **four whole weeks**.

Over 5 years it means that your child has missed **half a school year or one and a half terms!**

## **Every lesson counts...**

### ***A GCSE in 9½ DAYS?***

They may think they've got forever BUT look at how many hours of lessons they **actually** have over two years...

<b>French</b>	<b>9½ DAYS</b>	(2 x 45 min lessons per week)
<b>Maths</b>	<b>19 DAYS</b>	(4 x 45 min lessons per week)
<b>ICT</b>	<b>14 DAYS</b>	(3x 45 min lessons per week)

They will cover most topics **only once** in these hours – learning first time around is the key to successful revision and exam results!

**EVERY LESSON COUNTS!**

## How can I make a difference?



Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter their examination years, known in schools as Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11), confused by the complicated systems of choosing subjects and courses (GCSEs, IGCSEs, GNVQs, BTECs, FCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Functional Skills, Entry Level), controlled assessments, coursework, entry tiers and practical assessments. If you feel like this, you are **not** alone! The exam system has changed greatly over the past few years, and is continuing to change, with different types of schools (Academies, Foundation Schools, Independent Schools, Maintained Schools, Free Schools) all doing something different! Sometimes it feels as if it is best just to let the 'experts' at your child's school get on with it.

But your involvement during these crucial years can make an enormous difference – the crucial difference between success and failure or between 'D' and 'E' passes and 'A\*s to C's' (the difference between getting into further or higher education or not).

*Parental support is **eight times** more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a new study. The Campaign for Learning found that parental involvement in a child's education can mean the difference between an A\* and an 'also-ran' at GCSE. (TES, 10 October 2003)*

And the good news is – you don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects your child chooses to make a real difference, and you don't have to become a 'super-parent', giving up your own life and responsibilities – you just need to know how best to spend the time you do have, at each stage of the process.

This booklet enables you to do just this – providing you with the clear and practical information you will need to help him or her to meet the demands of the exam years, in partnership with the school. The booklet outlines exactly what your child needs to be able to do to succeed at each stage of the process to the best of their ability ('Key tasks for

pupils') and provides as many practical ideas to apply throughout the two examination years as we could cram in ('Tips for parents').

As with all our books, the suggestions are down to earth and have been used by ordinary parents with busy lives, just like yours.

### **Isn't it the school's job to get them through their exams?**

Yes, of course the school has an important role to play and can provide the expertise and resources to help your child acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to do their best in each subject. There will be many new expectations of your child in Years 10 and 11 – expectations which for many children, even the very brightest, are hard to meet. You don't need to know anything about maths, science or fine art to help them with these things – you've been doing it all their lives! New demands on your child are likely to include:

- Being more self-motivated and taking more responsibility for their own learning – this can be a big change from earlier years, with most teachers viewing it as the pupil's responsibility to attend and make the most of lessons once they get to Year 10.
- Asking when they do not understand. (This requires confidence and can be difficult at a time when friends' opinions hold such sway.)
- Developing their abilities to overcome frustrations, and strategies for persisting when they are learning material that they find challenging.
- Organising themselves, notes, handouts and information for different subjects, and different topics within these.
- Completing more work at home, independently.
- Organising and planning their time over longer periods of time
- Understanding the exam structure and the relative importance of each element to their final grade.
- Preparing for controlled assessments.
- Planning and carrying out their revision (especially now that most subjects are examined at the end of the two year period).
- Perfecting their 'exam technique'.



Perhaps the hardest demand on Year 10 and 11 pupils is that of understanding the long-term importance of doing the best they can, and learning to shelve short-term fun at times in the interest of long-term benefits (not easy even for adults).

Unfortunately for us, from the teenage perspective, interest and effort in education and the long-term benefits these can bring often come rather a long way down the priority list, after friendships, the 'right' clothes, social life, romantic concerns and hobbies.

In addition, children will differ in their levels of maturity, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, organisational skills and levels of motivation.

And this is where you come in. You are the expert on your own child and have always been his or her most important teacher. Your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exam years.

When you, your child and the school work in partnership, you can be sure that your child will achieve the best results possible.

### **So what is my role as a parent\*?**

Of course your role in helping your child to succeed will vary according to their needs and strengths. You will find that in the areas covered by some sections of the booklet you will have little to do, while others will require more support. All four of my own children have needed different levels of support in different areas – the final one getting on pretty much independently until her exams were looming, and then only needing support with drawing up a revision timetable and buying the files. With my older daughter it was a different story; although good at understanding the work she did in school, she needed much more support and structure – daily reminders to empty her bag of the day's stack of hand outs and notes, help with filing them, endless supplies to



replace lost pens, and, during the revision period, outright bribery to stick to the plan we had agreed.

Your role may include some or all of the following:

- Partner with school and child – going to parents' evenings, asking questions and finding out how you can best help your child at home.
- Provider of the tools for homework and revision – a quiet space, a 'workbox' of pens, paper and other necessities.
- Banker – paying for the tools, files and revision guides they need.
- Study buddy – showing an interest in the subject, helping with homework (but not doing it for them), testing them when they ask you etc.
- Entertainments officer – finding out about TV programmes, theatre productions, films, exhibitions relevant to your child's learning, and enjoying them together.
- Sounding board and adviser – helping your child to break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and celebrating achievements, and seeing a positive way forward when things go badly.
- Project manager – agreeing the rules for homework or revision (they won't work if they're imposed), helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against the 'fun stuff' and revising the plans as necessary.
- Go-between - for your child and the school when necessary; making sure problems are nipped in the bud and asking the questions your child can't or won't.



- Information provider and interpreter - finding copies of old exam papers, searching out websites, finding out about the subject, exam structures and content.
- Facilitator – discussing current affairs and your child’s opinion about items in the news



Whatever your individual child’s needs, your chief role will always be that of the person who cares most in the world, the champion of their needs and admirer of every achievement. The most important role you will play is that of the person who will love them and be proud of them whatever happens.

*\* The word ‘parent’ is used throughout the booklet, but of course you don’t have to be a parent to make the difference. Carer, older brother, grandparent or neighbour - it won’t make any difference to the effect you can have.*

## **Good exam results – what is the secret?**

We tend to think of our children's results being down to what happens on the day of the exam itself. Will they be in the right frame of mind? Will they be lucky and get the right questions? Will they remember what they have revised? In fact the results of exams are generally determined well before they sit the exam itself. There are a number of stages in the process of achieving exam success. The secret of good results in exams is about getting things right (and being aware of what can go wrong) at each stage of the process. The broad stages are:

### **STAGE 1: Learning the content first time round**

The process of revision (literally 'looking at something again') does assume that the content of the subject has been learnt in the first place - every lesson counts!

### **STAGE 2: Revision**

Even the 'perfect student', who has attended every lesson and paid attention throughout the exam years needs to revise to achieve their potential. For the rest of us the need for revision is even greater. Revision can be done in many ways, some of which are more effective than others. The booklet offers a way of planning revision as well as tips for using the most effective techniques.

### **STAGE 3: The exam itself**

Even with the first two stages successfully achieved, things can still go wrong. There are three sets of skills involved in taking exams – knowing the subject matter, organisational skills and 'exam technique'. These are dealt with in the booklet in the section entitled 'The moment of truth – sitting the exams'.