

Exam Anxiety

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Dr Mary O’Kane is a Lecturer in Psychology, Early Childhood Studies and Education. Her research interests include childhood transitions; resilience and self esteem and the value of play. She is a regular contributor on Ireland AM, Today FM, Newstalk Radio and Galway Bay FM discussing a broad range of parenting issues. She gives public talks on a range of topics related to child mental health and wellbeing, parenting and education. Her first book: *Perfectly Imperfect Parenting: Connection Not Perfection* was published April 2021. It can be purchased on: www.drmaryokane.ie

Exam Anxiety: Studying

- Try to get adequate sleep, exercise, and healthy food during exam preparation time.
- Study in max of 50-minute blocks with 10-minute breaks – include little ‘rewards’ for a job well done!
- Study by practicing what you have to do in the exam (writing answers to practice questions under a time limit).
- Maintain an attitude of doing the best you can under the circumstances, rather than requiring perfection from yourself.
- Research shows that feeling grateful has a big impact on levels of positivity. Even when you are experiencing a challenging time in your life, try to keep a gratitude journal to note the positive.

Challenging Negative Thoughts: Common thought distortions:

- **Black and white thinking:** Seeing everything as one way or another, without any in between.
- **Filtering thinking:** Choosing to see the negative side of a situation - how would you respond if a friend spoke about herself that way.
- **Catastrophising:** Assuming the worst is going to happen (often along with ruminating).
- **Personalising:** Assuming you are to blame for anything that goes wrong (a friend doesn’t smile at you when they pass you in the hall, it might not be about you! She might be upset or distracted).

Exam Anxiety: On The Day

- Don't panic - it is only an exam, not life or death!
- Read the paper and all the questions carefully. Choose your questions and order them (start with your best question, or with multiple choice which can trigger ideas!).
- Answer the required number of questions, this is the best way to get the most marks for your effort. Don’t keep working your best answer, instead start the next answer and get marks for that. Two questions answered will be worth more than one complete answer.
- For essays, sketch out a plan for answering each question. If your timing goes wrong and you end up with less time than you need to finish the last question, use the time to write out your answer in bullet points.
- Plan your time – this is the most common student error (Bring a watch!)
 - Divide your time according to the weighting of the questions
 - Write down the finishing time for each question
 - Make sure that you are answering the right number of questions
 - Allow 10 minutes of checking time at the end