

# Empathy and encouragement - Parent toolkit for matric exams

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Join Sacap's free Parents Guide to Matric Support Webinar 2023



Parents tread a delicate line during the high-pressure matric study and exam time. On the one hand you want to be motivating for optimal performance every step of the way, but it's easy to tip over into applying too much pressure on an already stressed-out teen. It's important for parents to have an accurate take on their child's unique coping mechanisms as it's not uncommon for teens to be adept at masking anxiety and stress. In other words, the teen presenting a carefree, even careless front may well be doing this to hide strong, fear-based emotions they haven't yet learnt to process.

Ziyanda Khumalo, a Sacap (South African College of Applied Psychology) student support and development advisor emphasises the importance of distinguishing between pressuring and motivating children.

She says, "If you notice your child is frequently anxious, stressed or even exhibiting signs of fear, it might indicate that they are feeling pressured. Your child may be overly focused on avoiding failure rather than striving for success. Perfectionism and frequent self-criticism may be also signs of too much pressure. There can be physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, trouble sleeping or changes in appetite. Procrastinating and losing interest in enjoyable activities can also be signs of reduced well-being."

Khumalo is on the Sacap panel of experts presenting the free [Sacap Parents' Guide to Matric support webinar](#) from 10am to 11:30am on Saturday, 19 August 2023. South African matric parents are invited to join the conversation by registering for the free one and a half hour webinar [here](#). The panellists' focus is on practical ways to navigate exam stress during the upcoming months.

Sacap educator and educational psychologist, Jacques Viljoen highlights how important it is for parents to be able to identify and understand stress in children.

He says, “Children often do not express their feelings and emotions as transparently as adults. This can make it challenging for parents to discern when their child is experiencing stress, anxiety, or other negative emotions related to exams. This means that active engagement and informed observation by parents are essential in understanding and supporting their child's emotional well-being.” Viljoen will unpack tools such as active listening, observation and using open-ended questions during the webinar.



Another key aspect of parental support during matric exams is providing adequate support and resources. Viljoen says, “Academic pressure and competition can be overwhelming for children. Parents need to ensure that they're not just focusing on grades but also on the holistic well-being of their children. It helps when parents continually remind their child that their worth is not solely based on exam results. Parents can focus on celebrating their efforts, resilience, and progress, not just the outcome.”

Supporting your child well includes providing a stress-free environment and promoting a balanced routine and healthy lifestyle. It is also important for parents to model positive behaviours such as managing your own stress and anxiety and paying attention to self-care. There are opportunities to boost your bonds by taking short breaks to be physically active together and to share healthy meals. Counsellor, Salma Kathrada will be joining the Sacap panel. She works with the wellbeing of families and will focus on practical ways to build healthy relationships and maintain family balance during exam time.

Khumalo concludes, “Open and non-judgemental conversations are the fuel for traversing the Matric landscape as smoothly as possible. To promote motivation rather than pressure parents can set realistic expectations and help their teens set achievable academic and study goals that are aligned to their abilities. Focus on being encouraging, and support appropriate time off for exercise, social interaction and relaxation. Offer emotional support, reassurance and a safe space for your child to express their feelings.

Celebrating small wins creates frequent positive reinforcement and builds confidence. Some parents may need to focus on letting go of the reins a bit and providing more autonomy so that their teen has some control over their study schedule and can make decisions that increase their responsibility. In the same vein, aim to encourage intrinsic motivation so your child can discover their personal reasons for studying which can lead to more sustainable self-motivation.

Remember that every child is unique, and it's important to maintain open communication so that you understand their needs and feelings during the exam season. While matric is without doubt a challenging time, it is potentially also a time of

learning, growing and deepening relationships.”

SA parents are invited to join the conversation, [Sacap Parents' Guide to Matric support webinar](#) from 10am to 11:30am on Saturday, 19 August 2023. Registration is free and you can RSVP on Zoom [here](#).

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