THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STUDY

Study Skills for Upper School Parents
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**MOTIVATION**

*Key Idea*  
There is no pill; we all need to take responsibility for self-motivation, for thinking about what is important to us.

*Common issues*  
Separating loss of motivation from deeper issues

Giving a message that a good result is not good enough

Too much pressure on future directions can lower motivation

*Passion beats brains*  
Ability is not set in stone, it develops with use; interest counts for a great deal

*The place of rewards*  
Try to build intrinsic motivation

Encourage kids to give themselves their own rewards

Be wary of too many external rewards

*General v specific aims*  
OK to not know specifics

Why are you here? Value the general achievement

Know what you enjoy, are interested in, follow this

*Personal bests*  
Good framework for strengthening persistence

Comparing self to self, not to others

Define by effort, outcome or improvement
PROCRASTINATION

Key Idea
We all procrastinate about something, the important question is “What am I avoiding?”

Avoidance is of the feeling associated with the task

Procrastination reinforces the need to avoid

Common causes

I just want to have fun
Not yet able to accept the demands of level of school

Anxiety
Worry about little things, future, perfectionism

Self-doubt
Won’t be good enough, compare self to others

Overwhelmed
Not know where to start

Environment
Chaotic, disorganised

Common solutions

Start early
Simple but effective

Accept reality
The school day finishes when homework is done, not at 3:30

Small steps
Breaking down big tasks into chunks – by time, section, process

5-minute technique
Trick yourself into starting for 5-10 minutes, then keep going; good for those who can’t start

Worst first
For those who repeatedly delay the same subject / task

Visual reminders
Calendars, white boards

Define success
By effort not outcome; focus on the task not the result
BRAIN-BASED TIPS

Fish oil
Good for brain function

Vitamin D
Good for sleep and mood; often low in winter

Diet-sleep-exercise
All make a difference; protein, low sugar, breakfast, outside time, 9 hours sleep optimal

Technology
Limit screen time before sleep

Neurochemicals

Key Idea
All have a different role to play

Use the quick quiz (at the end of these notes) to assess for any significant problem areas and ideas to implement

Dopamine
Pleasure and motivation; tend to drop in adolescence; aids attention and engagement

Adrenaline
Flight / fight response; optimal levels aided by sleep and routines; helps lift performance under pressure

Cortisol
Stress hormone; released with adrenaline; need some but too much over sustained period can lead to burnout

Serotonin
Feel good factor, aids calm decision-making and lowers depressive moods; exercise and sleep increase
HABITS AND ROUTINES

**Multi-tasking**
Is a myth and should be discouraged
Is extremely inefficient – 400% less
Even habitual multi-taskers are poor at multi-tasking
Technology complicates it

**Separate study from leisure**  A vital aspect of effective students
When you are working, work, when you are having a break, have a break
Work seems dragged out with no reward for finishing

**New routines**  3-6 weeks to consolidate
Allow time for schedules to be tested out
Combine regularity with some flexibility

**Organising & transforming information**  The most effective revision technique
Do this regularly for each subject – re-write notes, develop flash cards and mind maps, identify areas of confusion

**Vary the tasks**  Increases motivation and concentration

**Daily down time**  1 hour a day
Neurochemistry – quick quiz

Rate yourself on the following: 0=rarely, 1=occasionally, 2=sometimes, 3=often

Scores of 7+ indicate you should try to alter the neurochemical balance.

**Dopamine**
- a) I find it difficult to get focused on what I need to do
- b) I don’t feel motivate to achieve goals
- c) I am not proud of my accomplishments
- d) I often feel tired and unmotivated
- e) I am disinterested and won’t have a go 

Total score ____

**Adrenaline**
- a) I talk too much in class
- b) I argue and disagree too much
- c) I am reluctant to try new things
- d) I do silly things in class
- e) I can be really busy without getting much done

Total score ____

**Cortisol**
- a) I am reluctant to ask questions or raise my hand if I don’t know something
- b) I often can’t recall what I have learned
- c) If I don’t do well I think I am not smart enough
- d) I stress out a lot
- e) I worry more than most people about making mistakes

Total score ____

**Serotonin**
- a) If things get difficult I give up
- b) I am quiet and hard to talk to
- c) I am hard to please and I don’t like being praised
- d) I find it hard to get going in the morning
- e) I often ask why do we have to do this?

Total score ____

**What to do?**

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<th>Dopamine</th>
<th>Adrenaline</th>
<th>Cortisol</th>
<th>Serotonin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set goals</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>Enough rest</td>
<td>Eat breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swim, play tennis, percussion, handball</td>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>Routines</td>
<td>Get feedback</td>
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<td>Reward yourself</td>
<td>Give yourself enough time</td>
<td>Do little bits at a time</td>
<td>High protein diet</td>
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<td>Get outside and do something active</td>
<td>Plan carefully</td>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Talk to friends</td>
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<td>Challenge yourself</td>
<td>Slow down</td>
<td>Drink more water</td>
<td>Less caffeine and energy drinks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Switch off electronics</td>
<td>Start or shift to something earlier</td>
<td>Laugh more, it’s OK</td>
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