

The Stress Thermometer

A two-minute self-check for students and families

Stress is normal in exam season. This check helps you notice when it has crossed into something that deserves attention. It uses the PHQ-4, a brief, well-studied screening tool. It cannot diagnose anything — only a qualified clinician can — but it can tell you when it is time to talk to someone.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems? Circle one number in each row.

Problem	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	0	1	2	3

ANXIETY SCORE

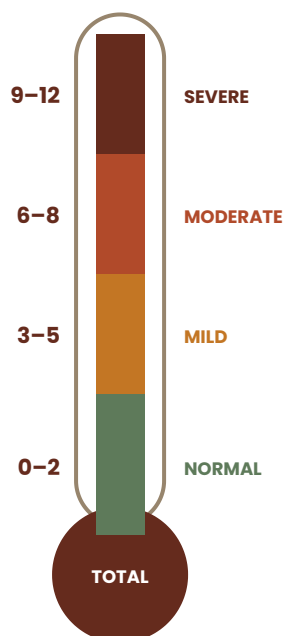
Questions 1 + 2 =

MOOD SCORE

Questions 3 + 4 =

TOTAL SCORE

All four (0–12) =



0–2

Normal. Keep protecting sleep, meals, movement and one day off a week. Check again in two weeks.

3–5

Mild. Use the stress tools in Blog 2 every day, talk to someone you trust this week, and recheck in two weeks.

6–8

Moderate. Please speak to a school counsellor, family doctor or mental health professional soon. Share this sheet with them.

9–12

Severe. Arrange a consultation with a mental health professional within the next few days.

≥ 3

On either sub-score (anxiety or mood) is worth discussing with a professional, even if the total is lower.

WHATEVER YOUR SCORE — if you have had thoughts that you would be better off dead, of harming yourself, or that others would be better off without you, please tell someone today. Call **Tele-MANAS 14416** or 1-800-891-4416 (free, 24×7), **Childline 1098** if under 18, or **112** in an emergency.

Healthy pressure or harmful stress?

Use this table alongside your score. If several rows in the right-hand column describe you for more than two weeks, it is time to talk to someone.

Area	On the climb (healthy pressure)	Over the crest (harmful stress)
Sleep	Tired at night, asleep within 20–30 minutes	Awake past 1 a.m., waking with a jolt, or sleeping 10–12 hours to escape
Body	Butterflies before a test that settle once it starts	Headaches, stomach pain, racing heart at rest, loss of appetite
Study	Focused, sometimes anxious, but progressing	Reading the same line for an hour; avoiding the feared subject entirely
Mood	Irritable in the week before an exam	Flat, tearful or angry most days; nothing feels enjoyable
Thoughts	"I need to revise thermodynamics again"	"I am a failure"; "everyone will be ashamed of me"; "what is the point"
Friends & family	Less time out, but still in touch	Withdrawn from almost everyone; avoids calls home

Track it every two weeks

Patterns matter more than one reading. Write the date and total score each time.

CHECK 1 Date: Score:	CHECK 2 Date: Score:	CHECK 3 Date: Score:	CHECK 4 Date: Score:	CHECK 5 Date: Score:	CHECK 6 Date: Score:
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Five things that help at any score

SLEEP 7–9 hours, same time each night	MOVE A 20-minute walk or game daily	BREATHE Three cyclic sighs when stress rises	TALK One honest conversation a week	REST One evening off, without guilt
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For parents and teachers

If a student shares a high score with you, thank them for telling you. Do not argue with the score, minimise it ("everyone feels like this") or lecture. Ask what would help, and help them reach a counsellor or doctor. A teenager who feels heard is far more likely to accept help.

HELP, ANY TIME

Tele-MANAS 14416 / 1-800-891-4416 (free, 24x7) · **Childline 1098** (under 18) · Emergency **112**

Comparison table adapted from Blog 2, "Exam Stress: When Pressure Helps and When It Harms" (Yerkes & Dodson 1908; Arnsten 2009). Educational use only; does not replace assessment by a qualified clinician.

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