



Excess anxiety can cause burnout



IT was about this time last year that Kate fell apart as she began her final year of high school.

Kate was a terrific student who had worked hard right through and always had great reports.

But, coming back for the last lap, she just ran out of steam. Her assignments started to pile up, she couldn't sleep, couldn't eat and this lovely natured girl became a rude, screaming, disobedient tyrant.

It was crisis time for the whole family and Kate ended up packing her bags, taking off and working for her uncle in a supermarket.

I recall reading interesting research in the *New Scientist* that indicated that where excess anxiety is applied to school-related work the brain can actually burn-out and be unable to gear up for the final leg of the marathon.

So this is the time for parents to take stock. If you find your anxiety level has gone up a notch or two since school began this year, then don't for a moment think your kids won't feel the added anxiety and tension in the home.

How well the students perform depends a lot on their personality, their peers, their past performances, their pedagogues and their parents.

PERSONALITY - some kids just aren't focused and all the bribing, badgering, belittling or depriving won't change that. If you can, work out what type of management suits their personality then you're well in front. Some students work better in the morning, some later, some work better alone and others in

company, some like short blocks and some longer, some work in silence, others with white noise.

PEERS - students tend to try as hard or as little as their peers or mates - their friends are their reference group so their attitudes and application will tend to conform to the group norm. The advantage of a conscientious peer group is that they can form study groups and study cooperatively and make it a bit more fun than confined to quarters.

PAST PERFORMANCES - if they have a history of success or effort then irrespective of your anxiety or theirs, that's probably how they'll handle this year. If they have never tried or applied themselves then that's probably how this year will go too. If they are moderately intelligent but healthy and happy then that's probably a better combination than dropping everything for the big UAI, or TER, VAC or whatever. I have often found that kids who are whipped along and just scrape into a course through outside pressure, often don't have the inside motivation to keep it going and drop out.

PEDAGOGUES - this is not just their teachers. Many feel the benefit of 1:1 tutoring, especially if it's done with someone of their own generation. A university student wanting pocket money often motivates them more because the student feels free to ask dumb questions and the tutoring is more fun. At school if students get the feeling the teacher is interested, available, accepting, helpful and

committed then students will also show greater commitment.

PARENTS - parents will often do more harm than good if they don't know the basic motivational ABC for students.

A - attitudes that ooze trust, confidence, understanding and respect. Now that's not easy if you've seen your kids make almost as many mistakes as ... you did at their age.

B - behaviour that is positive, supportive and which recognises that a good example is the best lesson and experience is the best teacher.

C - consequences are the way we all learn. Students will only gain confidence in themselves if they've learnt they can make and repair mistakes and survive.

No parent, no student gets it all right and just listening to the top 100% students from last year's NSW HSC I was reminded that there is no one right way to make it work. Some were very organised, some worked in bursts. But all seemed to feel they had their family firmly behind them.

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