

ExamAttack!

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Exam-stressed teenagers

Back in 1993, in my 'Hanging Around Ministry' with teenagers in school, I was very much aware of the immense pressure placed on pupils taking examinations. Some of this pressure comes from the pupils themselves as they strive to achieve their own academic targets; some pressure comes from siblings, parents and other family members; some comes from friends and peers; and, of course, a lot comes from teachers and schools!

As I wondered what could be done to support exam-stressed teenagers, I had

(designed by Ben Rolfe, a pupil from Desborough who attends my home church).

Wellbeing

I think one of the reasons *ExamAttack!* works, and is so popular with pupils, is because I am a visitor, not a teacher. No doubt, most of what I say is exactly what their teachers have said on numerous occasions! But, the pupils hear and respond to what I am saying because they realise I am more concerned about their personal (physical, emotional and spiritual) wellbeing than about their examination grades or their school's league table position.

contribute to lessons. This is important because it has enabled me to build up some very positive relationships with teachers who then feel comfortable asking me to lead an *ExamAttack!* session.

Growing demand

I love leading this session and find myself being asked to repeat it at various times during the school year – usually for Year 11 students in the run up to their GCSEs. But, what with end of Key Stage 3 tests, AS levels and A2 exams, I could well find myself working with most year groups in any given year in a typical 11–19 school.

A new development is that I have twice been asked to lead the seminar for parents. Although this was scary to begin with, I very much enjoyed sharing with

What the pupils say . . .

"I felt that this talk has helped me prepare for my exams."

"Brilliant! You present it in a way that everyone listens to and will understand."

the idea of leading some after-school training and counselling sessions for the Christian young people. To begin with they were promoted by word-of-mouth and were advertised through local church networks.

Over the years, though, *ExamAttack!* (as it has become known) developed into a bigger ministry. It currently reaches several hundred teenagers each year – most of whom are not Christians – in a dozen or so schools in the Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead area every year. Part of its popularity is down to the fact that the session is fun. The pupils get to hear some of my jokes and plenty of my stories (true, exaggerated, serious and humorous). Then, at the end of the session, everyone takes away a summary sheet of helpful tips and reminders. There is also an official *ExamAttack!* website

Yes, it would be great if *ExamAttack!* helped pupils to achieve great grades. After all, I always stress that pupils need to 'give of their best to achieve their potential'. But, as a Christian with a heart for exam-stressed teenagers, this is not my prime motivation. My main goal is to help everyone to put things into the right perspective and to realise that, whether they succeed or fail in terms of their exam results, they are still loved and appreciated by their friends and family. And, of course, I want them to know that God loves them.

As a Scripture Union schools' worker I am already involved with the schools I bring *ExamAttack!* to. I take assemblies and

"I thought it was really helpful."

them my talk about the 4 Ps (Pupils, Parents, Professionals and Partnership) necessary for success. In my experience a number of exam-stressed teenagers have exam-stressed parents (and teachers)!

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