2026-2027

THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO

Post 16 Options



TARPORLEY HIGH SCHOOL & SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

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The Parents' Guide to

The teenage years bring a lot of change - and not always clear answers for parents. From school and friendships to wellbeing, revision and next steps, it can be hard to know how best to support your child.

The Parents' Guide To gives parents practical, easy-to-use support to help them feel more informed, more confident and less alone.

What you'll find in this guide:

✓ **Clear, up-to-date information**
Straightforward explanations to help you understand the topic without jargon.

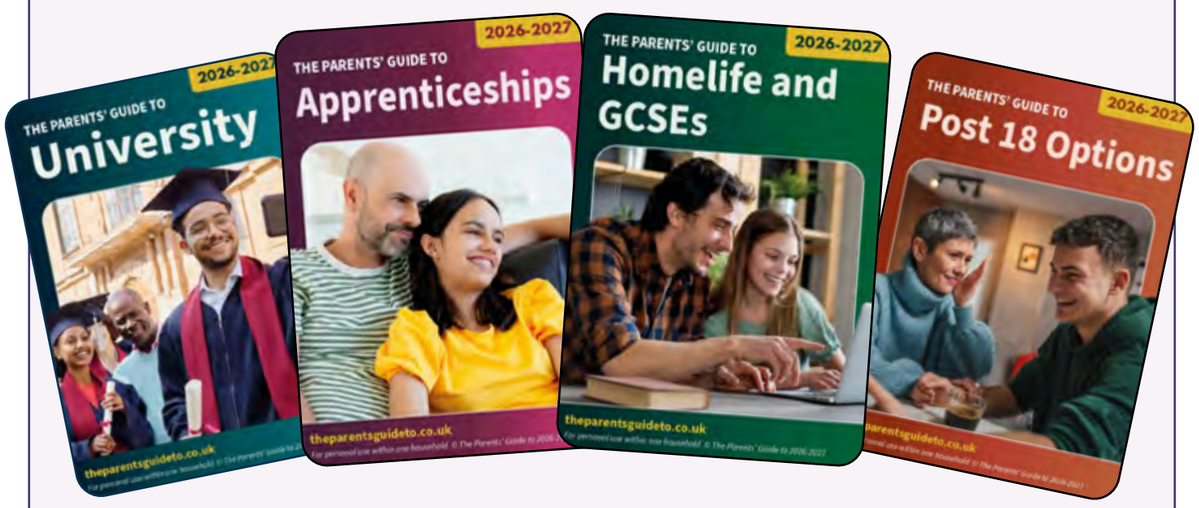
✓ **Practical advice**
Helpful ideas and tips you can actually use at home.

✓ **Links to trusted sources**
Signposts to reliable organisations and further support when you want to explore something in more detail.

✓ **Helpful next steps**
Simple suggestions to help you feel clearer about what to do next.

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Parent Club

Parent Club is our monthly membership for parents of teens, offering practical, ongoing support across the school year. From revision and future choices to wellbeing and family life, the teen years bring plenty of questions and decisions, and Parent Club is there to give you clear, reliable help when you need it most. What you'll get:

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Introduction

Once your teen has taken their GCSEs, they will have a range of choices about what to do next. Their post-16 decision can shape the subjects they study, the qualifications they gain and the opportunities available to them later, but it does not have to feel overwhelming.

There are plenty of options, and the best choice will depend on your teen's interests, strengths, preferred way of learning and future plans. This guide is designed to help you understand the different routes available, so you can support your teen in making a confident and informed decision.

We explain:

- what options are available;
- how to help your teen make the best choice for them;
- what qualifications they will gain;
- what they can do when the course is finished;
- where they might study;
- what support is available.

Remember, whatever your teen chooses after GCSEs, it does not have to define their future forever. Some routes may make certain next steps more straightforward, but very few choices close doors completely. If their plans change, they can still adjust direction later.

Parenting a teen?

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Discover more



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Practical advice you can actually use at home



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Contents

1. What can they do?
Understand the different routes your child can take after GCSEs, from academic to vocational options.

2. A summary of all their options
Compare the main choices side by side, so you can help your child weigh up what suits them best.

3. What else matters
How to guide your child in choosing a path that fits their interests, strengths, and future goals.

5. GCSE Results Day
What to expect, how to offer reassurance, and how to support next steps - whatever the outcome.

6. Additional Support
Financial help and other support available to help your child stay in education, training, or work.

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What can they do?

At 16, your teen can either continue in full time education or get a job that includes some formal, part-time education (for example, an apprenticeship or training). They cannot work full-time without some training element.

Most teens stay on at school or go to college, taking either A levels or BTECs. This works well for students that enjoy being in the classroom. However, for those that find it easier to learn through doing instead of listening (i.e. practical experience), they might achieve better results and be happier taking T Levels, an apprenticeship or some other technical qualification.

If they've struggled to get good results at GCSE and don't meet the minimum qualification requirements to get onto the next step in their career ladder, they can do an internship or traineeships to get the experience they need.

Thinking ahead

If they've got a job in mind, this may influence their choices and make decision-making simpler. For example, if they hope to train as a dentist, they'll probably want to take sciences at sixth form; or if they want to go into finance/accountancy, they may need to study maths.

Not many teens have a firm idea of what they want to do jobwise and many aren't sure if they want to continue studying once they're 18. Without an endgame in mind, choosing can be harder. Chat to them about how they learn easiest (listening or doing), whether the feel able to cope with exams (or if they prefer continuous assessment or coursework), and what subjects they enjoy most. This will guide the type of qualification they should choose and the subject areas.

Keeping their options open

When thinking of subjects, it's a good idea for your teen to make choices which give them some experience across lots of areas. This way they can find out more about what they do like rather than limiting their options by taking similar subjects.

Learning styles

If your teen doesn't perform well in exams, likes coursework or prefers learning through experience, they will enjoy taking BTecs, T Levels, apprenticeships or the IB diploma. Students that prefer listening and cope well with exams will enjoy the traditional A level or IBCP approach.

Remember

Nowadays, there are many different ways to reach similar careers. Don't fall into the trap of focusing on traditional routes (such as A levels) because they feel familiar and comfortable. It is better for your teen to take qualifications where they are more likely to do well than try less suitable qualifications where they are more likely to struggle or fail.



Options at 16 - at a glance

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At 16, your teen can either continue in full time education or get a job that includes some formal, training element. This means they cannot move straight into full-time work without continuing to learn in some way.

Talk to your teen about three things: - which subjects do they enjoy, do they know what they'd like to do after sixth form, and what type of learning-style suits them best.

A levels



A levels are academic qualifications usually studied over two years. They suit students who enjoy classroom-based learning and want to keep a wide range of post-18 options open, including university and higher apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships



Apprenticeships combine paid work with structured training. Students gain a recognised qualification while developing practical skills and earning a salary, making this a good option for those who prefer learning on the job.

T Levels



T Levels are a vocational alternative to A levels and involve a mix of classroom learning (about 80%) and practical experience (about 20%) including a 45 day on-the-job placement in a genuine business.

BTEC Nationals



Study takes place over a two year period and is a combination of both practical and theory. Knowledge is tested through course work and a final examination (comprising 40% of the total grade).

Supported Internships



Supported internships are designed for young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). They provide structured work placements alongside tailored support to help students move towards paid employment.

Other qualifications



Cambridge Technicals, City & Guilds, National Vocational Qualifications and the Tech Bacc. These are vocational courses, centred around jobs and practical skills, and suit students who prefer a more applied, hands-on approach.

Exam Retakes



Some students choose to retake exams (often English and maths) alongside other training or education. This can help keep future options open and strengthen progression to higher education or employment

Qualification / Educational Routes

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Level 8	**Doctorate (PhD)**		**NVQ 8**
Level 7	**Masters degree (MA)**		**Degree apprenticeship / NVQ 5, 6, 7**
Level 6	**Bachelors degree** BA or BSc		
Level 5	**Foundation degree** FdA or FdSc	**Higher National Diploma (HND)**	
Level 4		**Higher National Certificate (HNC)**	**Higher apprenticeship / NVQ 4**
Level 3	**A levels** Grades A-E; **International Baccalaureate**; **T Levels**; **BTEC Ext Diploma BTEC certificate**; **V Levels (new for 2027)**; **Advanced app. / NVQ 3 / Supported Internships**		
Level 2	**GCSE** Grades 4- 9 (C, B, A or A*)	**BTEC first diploma**	**Intermediate apprenticeship / NVQ 2**
Level 1	**GCSE** Grades 1- 3 (D,E,F or G)	**Foundation diploma / entry level qualifications**	**Traineeship / NVQ 1**
	Academic route	**Technical / Vocational route**	**Applied / work route**

Levels of Education

After GCSEs, there are three main routes your teen can take:

Academic - e.g. A levels, typically leading to university

Technical/vocational - e.g. T Levels or other applied courses, combining classroom learning with practical skills

Work-based - e.g. apprenticeships, where students earn while they learn

From 2027, new 'V Levels' will be introduced as part of the vocational route. These are expected to sit alongside A levels, T Levels and apprenticeships, offering a more flexible option that can be combined with other qualifications.

There are 8 qualification levels. The easiest is 1, the hardest is 8. There is also an entry level qualification for those just starting.

CHAPTER 2

A summary of all their options

Highlights include:



A levels and the EPQ

A traditional academic route with added research opportunities



International Baccalaureate

A broad, international qualification for students who enjoy a mix of subjects and independent thinking



BTECs, T Levels and V Levels

A practical alternative focused on skills and careers, with options to go to university or straight into work



Apprenticeships

For those keen to learn on the job while gaining recognised qualifications and experience



Other qualifications

A look at alternative routes that might better suit individual needs and ambitions



I really struggled with exams during my GCSEs. Choosing to take a T Level over A levels felt the right choice.

A Levels

An A level, or General Certificate of Advanced Level qualification, is an in-depth study of a subject over two years with an examination at the end to test knowledge. Learning mostly takes place in the classroom.

Students take three A levels, although some may take four. For students wishing to go on to university, UCAS points are awarded for up to three A levels. Points range from 16 to 56 points depending on the grade achieved. If a student takes four A levels, only their top three grades will count towards their total UCAS points.

Subject choices

There are many more subject choices at A level than GCSE, so it's possible they might choose a subject they haven't studied before. If they find they don't enjoy the subject as much as they'd hoped, most schools or colleges allow them to make changes towards the end of the first term. Students usually need at least a GCSE grade 6 in their subject choice, if it's something they have studied before, although exceptions can be made.

AS levels

If your teen chooses to study a subject for Y12 only, they can take an examination and obtain an AS level which counts as 40% of an A level. AS levels count towards UCAS points, ranging from 20 points (A grade) through 6 points (E grade), although not all schools/colleges offer AS levels.

Key tip:

If your teen wants to benefit from different learning styles, some schools offer the option to take a combination of A levels with BTEC.



AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

General Certificate of Advanced Level qualification

Type of learning

Mostly theory, , though some include practical elements

Entry requirements

At least 5 GCSEs grades 4 - 9 and at least a grade 5/6 in the subject/s chosen for A level (requirements may vary between schools)

Time

2 years full time

Subject choices

Typically 3 subjects

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

UCAS points

56 points – A*
48 points – A
40 points – B
32 points – C
24 points – D
16 points – E

Can lead to

University, further study, training or work

Discover more

UCAS
The Uni Guide

Extended Project Qualification

Alongside A levels (or equivalent), many schools offer EPQ (Extended Project Qualification) which is a dissertation or project created on the basis of independent research and worth between 8 and 28 UCAS points.

Students can choose the subject matter, so this can be focused around their interests.

A different approach to learning

There's minimum supervision for EPQs, just a little light guidance. This means that research, structure and composition of the project is down to your teen, as is meeting deadlines. This approach is much closer to what will be expected at university (or even in the workplace), so it's a good introduction to them finding their own way of learning. However, this style of working doesn't suit everyone, so check whether your teen can cope with the added pressures an EPQ may bring.



University offers

An EPQ is the equivalent to half an A-level. Unlike a fourth A level, the EPQ points are added to the UCAS total combined with the total achieved from the first three A level passes, so it can be a useful way for your teen to increase their UCAS points.

For universities that use subject grades rather than UCAS points for entry, some may even make two offers: one without the EPQ and one including the EPQ. For example, the standard offer might be BBB but the second offer (with the EPQ) could be BBC plus a pass grade in the EPQ. This might allow your teen the flexibility they need to meet the entry requirements of competitive universities.

What skills will your teen develop

In developing their own way of working, they're likely to become better at:

- Managing their time;
- Conducting research;
- Summarising lots of information clearly;
- Motivating themselves;
- Presenting to an audience;
- Reflecting;
- Working independently;
- Responding to feedback;
- Accepting when things don't go to plan.

These can be excellent qualities to mention in personal statements (if they are applying to university) or for discussion in interviews for jobs.

Key tip:

Students can choose the subject matter for their EPQ, so this can be focused around their interests or future degree / career plans.

IB Diploma (IBDB)

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The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (DP) - often referred to as the IBDP in UK schools and universities - is an internationally recognised qualification that combines rigorous academic study with personal development.

Students choose up to six subjects (three standard level and three at higher level) as well as undertaking some compulsory core modules. Most learning is theory, although there are some practical elements.

IB is graded by levels, with Level 7 (IBO certificate in higher level) earning 56 UCAS points. There are over 200 schools in the UK offering the IB diploma, although many are fee-paying schools.

Key tip:

The International Baccalaureate Organisation ("IBO") does not inspect schools once they have been approved to run IB, believing that results reflect standards, so it's important to check recent results.

Core components

In addition to their six subjects, each student must undertake three core modules designed to encourage them to become active, compassionate and life-long learners. These are:

- An extended essay - an in-depth study of a question relating to one of their chosen subjects, which requires independent research.
- The theory of knowledge - a course on critical thinking assessed through both an oral presentation and a 1,600 word essay.
- Creativity, action, service (CAS) - a series of activities alongside the student's academic study in creative thinking, healthy living and service to the community. The three strands of CAS are designed to grow a student's personal and interpersonal development through a journey of self discovery.

AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (DP)

Type of learning

Mostly theory, some practical

Entry requirements

Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs (grades 4-9)

Time

2 years full time

Subject choices

Up to six subjects (three standard level and three at higher level)

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

UCAS points

Each subject earns UCAS points:

- Up to 56 for Higher Level (grade 7)
- Up to 28 for Standard Level (grade 7)

Can lead to

University, further study, training or work

Discover more

IBO

Good Schools Guide

IB Career Programme (IBCP)

The International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme (CP) - commonly known as the IBCP in the UK - is designed for students who want to combine academic study with practical, career-focused learning. Although currently offered by a relatively small number of UK schools, the IBCP is gaining traction as interest in more flexible, career-oriented pathways continues to grow.

The IBCP is made up of three parts:

1. elements of the IB Diploma Programme
2. a unique CP core, (comprising four related components: personal and professional skills, service learning, reflective project and language development)
3. career related study through an approved provider.

Flexibility and personalisation

Students choose at least two subjects from the six diploma subject groups (IBDP) and must take the CP core and career related study. The diploma subjects can be studied at higher level (HL) or standard level (SL) – or a combination of both.

Schools can create their own distinctive version of IBCP to meet the needs and backgrounds of their students, including selecting the diploma courses they offer to students within the six subject areas.

Grading

IBCP is graded differently for each component. The diploma elements are assessed by exams and graded from 1-7; the reflective project is assessed by the school and moderated by IB with grades ranging from A-E; the remaining elements are assessed by the school.

To obtain an IBCP students must achieve a minimum grade of 3 or higher in two of the diploma elements, D or higher on the reflective project in addition to completing the other components.



AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

The International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme (CP)

Type of learning:

Balance between practical and theory

Entry requirements

Set by the school

Time:

2 years full time

Subject choices

At least two from the IB diploma range + CP core + career related study

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

UCAS points:

Students earn UCAS points for:

- Diploma subjects (same as IBDP)
- Reflective Project (up to 12 points, grade A)

Can lead to:

University, further study, training or work

Discover more

IBO

BTEC Nationals

BTECs at Level 3 are a similar standard to A levels with a focus on vocational subjects. The subsidiary diploma is equivalent to one A level, the diploma is equivalent to two and the extended diploma is equivalent to three A levels.

Study takes place over a two year period and is a combination of both practical and theory. Knowledge is tested through course work and a final examination (comprising 40% of the total grade).

For those wishing to go to university, subsidiary diplomas offer the same opportunity to earn UCAS points as A levels (15 to 56 points). UCAS points for BTEC diplomas and extended diploma are double and trebled respectively.

If your teen prefers learning through practical application, they will more likely do better taking BTECs than A levels. However, some universities have a preference for A levels over BTEC, so if your teen has their heart set on a specific university or course, it's worth checking entry requirements to see whether this will influence their sixth form choices.

Changes for students

With the introduction of V Levels in 2027, alongside the refinement of T Levels, there are plans to phase out BTECs in the future. Subject choices will be reduced, and this applies to the 2026/2027 academic year. The most significant changes are in areas that overlap with T Levels, such as health, science, digital, and education. Check carefully with the school or college if your teen is planning on taking BTECs.

Key tip:

BTECs offer the chance of earning the same points for UCAS as A levels and provide a way to learn through practical application and coursework.

AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

Business and Technology Education Council Diplomas

(Level 3 are similar standard to A levels, with subsidiary diploma equivalent to one A level, BTEC diploma equivalent to 2 A levels and extended diploma equivalent to 3 A levels

Entry requirements

Up to 5 GCSEs

Subject choices

Up to 3 vocational subjects

UCAS points:

56 points - D* (distinction)
48 points - D (distinction
32 points - M (merit)
16 points - P (pass)

Type of learning:

Combination of practical and theory

Time:

2 years full time

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

Can lead to:

University, further study, training or work

Discover more

UCAS
Pearson Education

T Levels (England only)

T Levels (Technical Level Qualifications) were introduced in September 2020. One T Level is equivalent to 3 A Levels. These 2-year courses were developed with employers to meet business needs and prepare students for working life.

T Levels mix classroom learning with a work placement of around 45 days (i.e. 20% of the course time). They provide the knowledge, skills and experience needed for students to get ahead in their chosen industries or go on to further study or a higher apprenticeship. T-Levels offer the chance to earn between 72 and 168 UCAS points.

The industry placement

A fantastic element of T Levels is the industry placement: a real job in a genuine business. First-hand work experience is hugely beneficial to students, enabling them to get a feel for what it's like in the world of work, learn skills and decide whether they like the industry sector they've chosen – it's not too late to make a change post-18 if they don't!

T Level Transition Programme

For teens that don't have the necessary skills to go straight to T Level, they can take the T Level Transition Programme – a one year course after GCSE to prepare them for the subject they would like to study.

Want to understand T Levels (or V Levels) properly?

Our guide explains how T Levels and V Levels work, who they suit, how they compare with A levels and apprenticeships, and what parents should consider before their teen chooses this route.

Shop now



AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

Technical Level Qualification

Type of learning:

Classroom learning (80%) with industry placement (20%)

Entry requirements

Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs

Time:

2 years full time

Subject choices

As of September 2024 there will be over twenty subjects available including accounting, engineering, digital business services, education and teen care, finance, health, law, management, on-site construction and science.

Tuition costs

Free

Can lead to:

University, further study, training or work

UCAS points:

168 points – Distinction*
144 points – Distinction
120 points – Merit
96 points – Pass (C or above)
72 points – Pass (D or E)

Discover more

Gov UK
The Parents' Guide to

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are real jobs which include learning elements which might take place at university, college or an education provider. Apprenticeships were developed to help address the skills shortage in UK businesses. They provide a way of combining learning with on the job training to build professional skills transferable from one organisation to another.

Sixteen year olds can start an apprenticeship at Level 2 (few qualifications required) or Level 3 (5 GCSEs required). There is no level one as enrolling on an apprenticeship requires demonstrating a certain ability. Students with no qualifications can take on a traineeship or internship to help them achieve the necessary skills to start an apprenticeship - see page 31.

Most apprenticeships work towards one or more qualifications. These qualifications correspond to the level of apprenticeship. Advanced apprenticeships (level 3) provide qualifications equivalent to 2 A levels. Level 3 qualifications may include National Certificates, National Diplomas or NVQs which will open up choices once your teen is 18.

Flexibility

Apprenticeships are often flexible in that it may be possible to extend the apprenticeship period and obtain a higher qualification. For example, some apprenticeships will allow students to continue on to a higher apprenticeship (level 4 / 5) once the advanced apprenticeship is complete. Always check with their employer whether such progression is possible.

Key tip:

Unlike BTECs, which are studied at school or college, apprenticeships also include an element of study at work, so there is a real-life component to the course.

AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

Advanced Level 3 (equivalent to 2 A levels)

Type of learning:

Work based including off-site learning

Entry requirements

Advanced Level 3 - depends on employer, some require at least 3 GCSEs. Students need to show they can complete the programme

Time:

1-2 years

Tuition costs

Free

Subject choices

Range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered

Can lead to:

Further study, training, professional development programmes or work

UCAS points:

168 points – Distinction*
144 points – Distinction
120 points – Merit
96 points – Pass (C or above)
72 points – Pass (D or E)

Discover more

Apprenticeships - GOV

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Internships & Traineeships

Traineeships

Traineeships were short-term education and training programmes designed to help young people develop the skills and experience needed for an apprenticeship or job. The national traineeships programme ended in August 2023, although similar opportunities may still be offered locally by some providers.

Internships

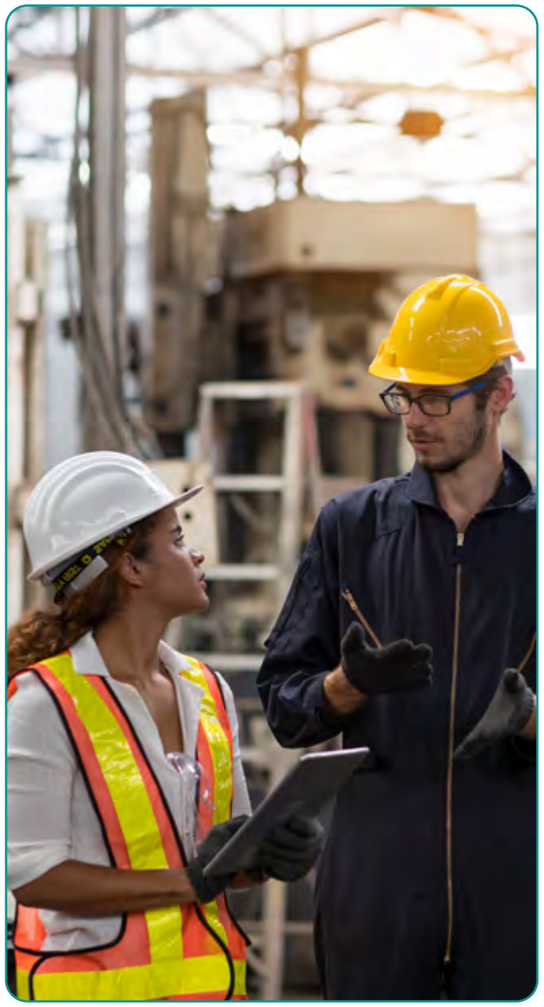
Whilst internships can be useful, they should not be confused with apprenticeships. Internships are informal arrangements with an employer, there is rarely a signed contract, they are usually short-term (less than one year) and they do not result in a formal qualification. They do offer an insight into business, networking opportunities, the possibility of job offers afterwards and the ability to learn practical, transferable skills. They may be useful in giving a student enough experience to start an apprenticeship.

Key tip:

These routes can be very helpful for non-academic students who may be better at picking up practical skills.

Supported internships

Supported internships are for students with learning difficulties or impairments who want to get a job and need extra support to do this. They're a good way to get the training and experience your teen needs to get into work.



AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

Traineeship / volunteer with training / internship – all to help your teen get enough skills to take on an apprenticeship or other form of qualification if they do not already have the minimum qualification requirements.

Type of learning:

Work based

Time:

6 weeks – 6 months

Entry requirements

None

Tuition costs

None

Subject choices

Range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered

Can lead to:

Further study, apprenticeships, job offers

UCAS points:

None

Discover more

GOV - Traineeships

GOV - Internships

Other Qualifications

Other qualifications available include Cambridge Technicals, City and Guilds, National Vocational Qualifications and Tech Bac (similar to the International Baccalaureate). They are vocational driven courses – i.e. centred around jobs and are well suited to students who know what type of job they want to do when they leave education or who prefer a more practical working style but still want to include classroom learning in their education.

Cambridge Technicals

With examination marks split 50%-50% between coursework and examinations, the Cambridge Technicals offer a very practical route to learning, but students must be well-organised, able to handle lots of projects at once and be able to meet deadlines in order to succeed.

National Vocational Qualification

National Vocational Qualification is a work-based way of learning. There are no examinations, assessment is made on a student's competence to complete the task. Whilst NVQs are vocationally focused, they can be studied at school and college as well as at work.

Key changes for 26/27

Now that T Levels have been rolled out and with the introduction of V Levels in 2027, many of these alternative qualifications will be phased out. Subject choices will be reduced, and this applies to the 2026/2027 academic year.

Check carefully with the relevant education provider if your teen is planning on taking alternative qualifications; however, this does not negate the value of getting these qualifications where they are still available.

AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type

City and Guilds; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or Tech Bac (similar to International Baccalaureate)

Type of learning:

Dependent on the qualification, most contain practical on the job training

Entry requirements

Usually 5 GCSEs grade 4 - 9, but check individually

Time:

2 years (level 3)

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

Subject choices

Range of vocational subjects

Can lead to:

Further study, training, professional development programmes or work

UCAS points:

In most cases no UCAS points are awarded but there are some exceptions.

Discover more

- Cambridge Technicals
- City and Guilds

V Levels (new for 2027)

V Levels, or Vocational Level qualifications, are a new government-backed Level 3 pathway planned for first teaching from 2027. They will sit alongside A levels (academic) and T Levels (technical), creating a clearer vocational option for students who want a more applied route after GCSEs.

V Levels are designed for students who want to explore an employment sector without fully specialising straight away. They are expected to be the same size as an A level, and students will be able to take V Levels in multiple subjects, or combine them with A levels, as part of a broader programme. Their content will be linked to occupational standards so that what students learn reflects real workplace skills and progression routes.

Applied learning and assessment

V Levels are intended to include more applied learning than a purely academic course. While the full assessment model is still being finalised, the government expects V Levels to have a higher proportion of non-exam assessment than many A levels (for example, projects or tasks that assess practical application as well as knowledge).

What happens to BTECs and other vocational qualifications?

V Levels are part of a wider plan to simplify post-16 options. From 2027, they're intended to replace many existing Level 3 vocational qualifications over time (including BTECs). Exactly how quickly this will be phased in, and which courses will change first, is still to be confirmed.

We'll provide updates as soon as information becomes available – **click here.**



AT A GLANCE:

Qualification type
Vocational Level Qualification

Time:
2 years full time

Entry requirements
Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs

Tuition costs
Free

Subject choices
Planned across broad vocational areas (the final list is still being developed).

Can lead to:
University, further study, training or work

Type of learning:
Classroom learning plus applied, vocational assessment (e.g. projects and tasks linked to real workplace skills).

Discover more
Because V Levels are still being developed, check what your teen's school/college plans to offer and keep an eye on official updates as details are confirmed.

A summary of all their options - part 1

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	Qualification Type	Type of learning	Entry requirements	Subject choices	UCAS points	Can lead to
A levels (academic)	General Certificate of Advanced level qualification	Mostly theory	At least x5 GCSE grade 4 – 9. At least grade 5/6 in the subject/s chosen for A level	Typically three subjects	56 points – A* 48 points – A 40 points – B 32 points – C 24 points – D 16 points – E	University, further study, training or work apprenticeship
International Baccalaureate	Diploma Programme (IBDP)	Mostly theory, some practical	Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs	Up to six subjects plus some compulsory modules	Up to 56 for Higher Level and 28 for Standard Level (7). In the IBCP, students also earn up to 12 points for the Reflective Project.	University, further study, training or work
	Careers Related Programme (IBCP)	Balance between practical/theory		At least two from the IBDP range + CP core + career related study		
V Levels (vocational)	Vocational Level Qualification	Classroom learning plus applied, vocational assessment	Up to 5 GCSEs	Introduced 2027 in a limited range of subjects. Gradual rollout.	To be confirmed, will be mapped to A levels (56 points max).	University, apprenticeships, training or work
BTEC Nationals	*(Level 3 are similar standard to A Levels, with subsidiary diploma equivalent to one A level, BTEC diploma equivalent to two A levels and extended diploma equivalent to three).*	Combination of practical and theory	Up to 5 GCSEs	Three vocational subjects	For subsidiary diploma: 56 points – D* *(distinction)* 48 points – D *(distinction)* 32 points – M *(Merit)* 16 points – P *(Pass)* *Points are doubled for diploma and tripled for extended diploma*	University, further study, training, professional development programmes or work
T Levels (technical)	Technical Level Qualification	Classroom learning (80%) with industry placement (20%)	Up to 5 GCSEs	One industry field, such as construction or Education	168 points - D* 144 points - D 120 points - M 72 - 96 points - P	University, apprenticeships

A summary of all their options - part 2

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	Qualification Type	Type of learning	Entry requirements	Subject choices	UCAS points	Can lead to
Cambridge Technicals	A Cambridge Technical Extended Certificate (equivalent to an A level) or Cambridge Technical Diploma (equivalent to x2 A levels)	Practical course with lots of coursework based on real life case studies	At least x5 GCSE passes	Range of vocational subjects	Cambs Tech level 3: 56 points – D* (distinction) 48 points – D 32 points – M (merit) 16 points – P (pass)	University, further study, training or work
Other Qualifications	City and Guilds; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or Tech Bac (similar to Baccalaureate)	Dependent on the qualification, most contain practical on the job training	Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs	Range of vocational subjects	In most cases no UCAS points are awarded but there are some exceptions.	Further study, training, professional development programmes or work
BTEC Apprenticeships	Advanced Level 3 (equivalent to x2 A levels)	Work based including off-site learning	Advanced Level 3 - depends on employer, some require at least 3 GCSEs	Range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered	N/A	University, further study, training or work
Other Options	Traineeship / Volunteer with training / internship / National Forces – a starting point to other qualifications or work	Work based	None	A range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered	N/A	Further study, apprenticeships or work

Make the year ahead easier

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Whether your teen is preparing for exams, choosing their next steps or simply going through the ups and downs of teen life, Parent Club gives you clear, practical support month by month.

You'll feel more confident knowing:

☑ what's coming up over the term
☑ the key decisions your teen will face
☑ how to support them in the moments that matter
☑ how to guide them without adding pressure



Regular advice, at the right time

You'll receive helpful emails throughout the year, with clear, practical guidance on what's coming up and how to support your teen at each stage. Instead of trying to work things out on your own, you'll have timely advice to help you feel informed, prepared and confident.

Parent talks

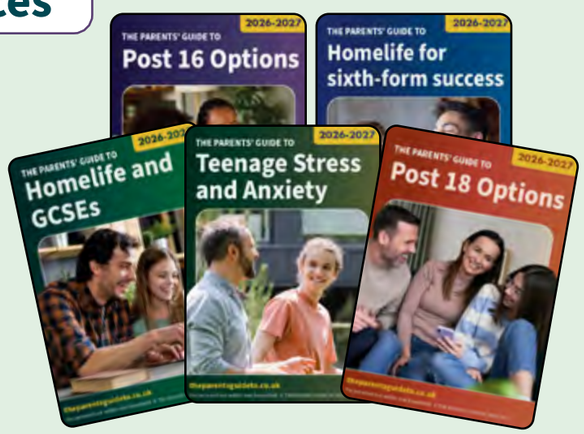
You'll have access to all our online parent talks, covering key topics such as exams, wellbeing, choices, careers and teen life. Each session is focused and practical, giving you clear takeaways you can use straight away – with time for Q&A.



Parent guides and resources

You'll also get access to our most popular specialist guides and resources. These provide more in-depth support when you need it, helping you handle important moments with clarity and confidence.

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CHAPTER 3

Making informed choices

Highlights include:



Deciding What To Study

How to help your teen pick subjects they enjoy, are good at, and that keep future options open.



Where's Best To Study?

Should they stay at school, move to a college, or enter the workplace? What environment will help them thrive?



Is It Time For A Change?

Think about things like travel, support needs, workload, and how your teen copes with change.



GCSE Results Day

What to do on the day, how to respond to unexpected results, and how to support your teen.



Making The Right Choice

How to weigh up the options together - and why flexibility is important if plans change later on.



At 16 I was ready to leave school. I went to my local college where I was able to have a fresh start in a more adult environment.

Deciding what to study

Talk to your teen about three things: - which subjects do they enjoy, do they know what they'd like to do after sixth form, and what type of learning-style suits them best.

What your child is good at and enjoys

Most of us are better at things we enjoy than things we don't. Your teen will need to spend a lot of time on whatever sixth form option they select, so they choose to study a subject they're interested in.

GCSE results can be a useful indicator of whether they'll do well in a subject. If they have not already studied the subjects at GCSE, speak to their teacher to get advice on whether they're likely to do well.

What your child wants to do next

If your child already knows the profession they want to work towards, or the subject they hope to study at university, their sixth form choices may be more straightforward. Some careers and degree courses require specific subjects, so it is worth checking entry requirements carefully before they make their final decisions. This can help them choose subjects that keep the right pathways open.

What type of learning suits them best

If your teen has their heart set on a career choice but haven't done well at GCSE in the subjects needed, vocational courses can be helpful. Someone that wants to go into business could avoid a maths-heavy Economics A level and choose to take a BTEC in Business Studies instead.

Thinking of university later?

Different universities have different entry requirements, so check the university's website for details. Subject combinations, types of qualification and subject grades needed for entry not only vary from university to university, but may also differ within the same university for different degrees. If in doubt, call the university and speak to admissions.

Where to find out more:

- Speak to your teen's career advisor.
- Speak to your teen's current teachers;
- Speak to sixth form teachers;
- Speak to other students;
- Read subject guides;
- Review university websites;
- Check text books;
- **The Parents' Guide to website**



Where's best to study?

The 16-18 age range is a very important time for a teenager because it marks the transition from teen to adult. If they are going to continue with full time education (rather than joining the workplace through an apprenticeship, traineeship, internship or voluntary role), where they study is an important consideration.

It may seem an easy decision to continue studies at their current school; however, this is not always the best option and is sometimes not possible. Some schools may not offer the subject or qualification choices your teen wants to study, some schools don't have a sixth form, some schools have a joint sixth form (which your teen may not like) and some students are just keen to leave the school environment.

It is important that your thoughts and feelings are taken into consideration when making the decision about "what next", but remember, the choice should ultimately be your teen's.



Continuing at the same school

There are lots of benefits to this for your teen: they know the staff, they will have friends there and they are familiar with journey times and routes. It's also nice for them to be role models to younger pupils and this, combined with the familiar environment, can help build self-confidence. In most cases, sixth forms are smaller than colleges and provide more support. For students with special educational needs, they know what support is provided and whether their needs are met (support can vary widely from one institution to another).

However, because schools are smaller, they are unlikely to have as many subject choices or vocational courses as colleges. Students need to watch out about becoming complacent by being the "big fish in a small pond". Staying at the same school may well be the right choice, but don't automatically assume this, even if it is the most convenient option.

Applying to sixth form in another school

Providing the school is offering the right subject and course options for your teen, this can be a good compromise between staying at the same school or going to college. The challenge of meeting new teachers, new friends and working in a different atmosphere with a different daily journey still exists, but the smaller numbers, greater guidance and nurturing environment also applies. It can prove a good way for your teen to start to take control of their own lives, increase confidence and improve communications without everything changing at once.

Depending on GCSE results, changing schools can provide the opportunity of going to a more academic school or one that has greater focus on co-curricular interests that may provide job opportunities in the future (such as rowing, music, drama etc). A fresh environment can inspire fresh ideas.

Going to college

The great thing about colleges is that they have a huge range of academic and vocational courses to study, so there will be plenty of choice. Also, all their focus is on the 16-19 age-range so all facilities and additional offerings are aimed at the same age group, unlike schools who are caring for children of many different ages, sometimes as young as early years. Teachers and lecturers will all be experts in their specialist subjects for this age range.

Colleges tend to be larger and less personal than school sixth forms; the experience is much closer to life at university. This is ideal for students who are disciplined at managing their own studies and can meet deadlines on their own, but students that need nudging, coaxing and reminding are less likely to do well. Of course, learning these skills is important regardless of whether they want to go onto university or start work after sixth form, but some sixteen year olds need a little more guidance than others.

The question is whether your teen will do well with new teachers to get to know, a new environment and, in most cases, a whole new set of friends to make. If they like the challenge of stretching beyond their comfort-zone, it can be a great stepping stone from school to university but if they are reserved, it could be over-whelming.

Independent learning providers

It doesn't have to be a choice of school or college. There are independent organisations that offer entry level courses and employability training for young people who want to get a qualification or learn the skills to help find a job.

Vocational learning

If they are taking vocational learning, such as an apprenticeship, the learning location will be chosen by their employer, who will have an arrangement with a local school, college or other education provider. They will not be able to influence this.

Creative Courses

If your teen is looking to study art, design, photography, media or illustration they will need to put together a portfolio of work showcasing their abilities.



Is it time for a change?

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Academic or vocational?

If your teen's keen to focus on vocational qualifications they are likely to find more choice at colleges than at schools. If they do want to stay at school, BTEC courses might be more appealing than A Levels.



Single sex or co-ed?

Sixth form can be a great opportunity to move from single sexed schools to mixed schools (or vice versa). This can be a good time to go co-ed and start acclimatising to the atmosphere with both sexes, which is what they will experience at work and in post-18 education. However, there can be a lot of social pressure so is this the right time for your teen to adapt?



State to private?

Private education is expensive, but sixth form does offer the opportunity of benefiting from smaller classes, greater pastoral care and more guidance whilst knowing the financial commitment is just two years.



Private to state?

If your teen's at private school and finances are beginning to pinch, this can be a good time to move. Your teen won't get the same level of personal attention but a stronger atmosphere encouraging self-management and accountability can put them on a good path for the future.



Day school to boarding?

If your teen is sure they want to go to university, experiencing boarding can get them used to living away from home whilst still under the protective guidance of a school so they don't go off the rails.



Small or large?

Will your teen work better with close supervision in a smaller school or will they thrive with more independence in a larger college?



Leaving education

Jobs with training or short-term apprenticeships offer the chance to get into work without continuing intensive, academic study. There are training elements that will include theory, but it is much more practical and competence is often assessed on the job rather than via examinations.



Behaviour

It's not uncommon for teens to think that poor behaviour won't have a lasting impact. Help them be aware! Not only is it more likely that students that behave poorly won't do as well in their GCSEs, but behaviour counts too. Some schools, whether the school they're already at or a different one, won't accept students into sixth form if they have regular records of poor behaviour.

GCSE Results Day



When GCSE results come out in August 2027, if your teen hasn't done as well as they had hoped, be reassuring and supportive. There are alternatives and a positive approach offers a faster route to finding happy solutions.

Encourage them to use the experience to their advantage. Do they need to change the type of qualification (say BTEC instead of A Level)? Are their GCSEs an indicator of future performance, so should they reconsider their subject choices?

Speak to their school teachers to get advice about next steps and download The Parents' Guide to GCSE Results Day. Available from June, we cover how to prepare for results day, how to make the most of the holidays, and detailed guidance on what to do and who to call if things don't go to plan.

Possible options if they don't do well in their GCSEs

1. **Speak to their chosen place of study – they may still offer a place, sometimes with conditions (e.g. extra support or a different course)**
2. **Retake key GCSE subjects (especially English and Maths)**
3. **Consider alternative Level 3 routes, such as a different sixth form or college with lower entry requirements, or courses like BTECs/T Levels/ V Levels**
4. **Gain experience through work, volunteering or a structured course to build skills before continuing in education**
5. **Start a Level 2 apprenticeship or a pre-apprenticeship programme**

CHAPTER 4

Additional support

Highlights include:



SEND

Guidance and resources to help your teen access the right support if they have special educational needs or disabilities.



Financial Support

What help is available to cover education, travel, meals, and other costs after GCSEs.



Final Words

Whatever path your teen takes, there's more than one way to succeed - and you don't have to figure it all out at once.



Finding out I was entitled to 25% extra time and rest breaks in my GCSE exams took off a lot of the pressure.

SEND

If your teen has SEND (special educational needs or a disability) and is moving to a new educational establishment (whether a different school, college or other education provider), make sure you advise them in advance so that they can be involved in ensuring they are able to meet your teen's needs or get support from outside if necessary.

Regular Assessment

The school or college should regularly assess your teen's needs and keep written records of reviews. They will communicate directly with your teen, so you'll need to come to an agreement about how you'll be kept up to date so that you can be involved and provide the right level of support.

Discover more

- ✓ GOV UK
- ✓ SEND Parent Hub

Finding local support services

All local authorities are required, by law, to provide information and advice for children and young people with SEN. This is available online, by phone or face to face. If you check your local government's website, you will find the Local Offer section which provides information on education, health and social care services in your area.
You can also approach your teen's existing school, your doctor or charities and other organisations that offer support and services.

EHCs

If you teen has an education and healthcare plan ("EHC") this will continue to apply through their post-16 studies (but not if they progress to higher education after they are 18).
If they have an EHC and they have additional needs outside of those met by the school or college in order to deliver on the provision set by the plan, you can request a Personal Budget to help (such as therapy or transport costs). Applications are considered by the local authority on a case by case basis.

If your teen does not have an EHC but you think they need one, you (or they) can request an assessment.

Benefits

If your teen has SEND they might get some help during exams, such as more time, permission to use technology (such as being able to type a paper rather than handwrite it), a reader, a scribe, rest breaks and even a separate room. However, they will have to demonstrate a history of need.

Key tip:

All Further Education providers should have a named individual in charge of SEND provision.



Financial support

Education and training are usually free for 16–18-year-olds (unless attending a private school).

If you receive Child Benefit or Child Tax Credit, these may continue until your teen turns 20, as long as they remain in approved full-time education or training. Universal Credit may also be affected, so it's important to notify the relevant authority of any changes.

Additional financial support may be available depending on your circumstances:

Discretionary bursary

It may be possible to get a discretionary bursary if students need financial help but do not qualify for a bursary for students in vulnerable groups. The education or training provider decides how much is awarded and what it's used for.

Free meals

Students from lower-income families may be eligible for free meals if they are studying at a school or college funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Residential loans

Students needing specialist provision which means they have to live away from home to study can apply for residential loans via the ***Residential Bursary Fund.***

Vulnerable Groups

Students classed as vulnerable groups (such as in care, receiving income support or disability allowance) can claim a bursary up to £1,200 each year.

Grants

It may be possible to get a grant from the ***Family Action Trust***, who provide small grants for additional costs associated with a course of study such as clothing and/or equipment required for the course, travel, examination costs, computers/ laptops.

Care to Learn

Students under 20 years old with their own children can apply for "care to learn" grants to provide childcare while they are studying up to a maximum of £160 per week (£175 in London) via the ***Student Bursary support service.***

Where to find out more:

There's heaps of information about post 16 options on the Government's website. You can find details of what's available in your local area by checking your Local Authority's website – find your local council here.

Your teen's current school should also be able to help and you can approach any further education institute directly.

There's free advice from the National Careers Service.

Discover more

- ✓ **Bursary Fund**
- ✓ **NCS**



Final Words

Sixteen marks a milestone for you and your teen. It's a great opportunity to reflect on what's worked so far and what might need adjusting for the future.

If your teen has had a difficult time so far, it's a chance to reflect on why - and perhaps change their style or place of study for a fresh start. If they love their school and can take the right qualifications, there's no need to leave; if they've enjoyed it but feel they've outgrown it, now's the perfect time to move on. And if they're ready to get into the workplace, there are plenty of options, whether they want to combine academic learning or focus on practical experience.

Sixteen is possibly the first time your teen is making decisions for themselves that will have a significant impact on their future. It's important for them to realise that they will need to make choices that are right for them and not follow what their friends are doing; it's the first step toward their independent future.

Whilst they should be making decisions for themselves, it's still important that they get help, guidance and reliable advice from you.



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Support that arrives at the right time

Parenting a teen can bring different challenges at different points in the year. That is why **Parent Club** gives you month-by-month support that reflects what is actually coming up, from exams and next steps to wellbeing and everyday worries. You'll get helpful advice at the right time, so you feel more supported and better equipped as things arise.

Live calls

All Parent Club members get free access to our expert-led live calls on the topics parents ask about most, with practical advice, helpful insight and the chance to ask questions and take away ideas you can actually use at home.

Helpful guides

You'll also get access to selected digital guides across the year, giving you extra support on key topics and more depth when you need it.



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Live Talks - What's Coming Up

Finding Work Experience

Struggling to know how to help your teen find work experience? This talk looks at realistic ways to find opportunities, what counts, and how you can support them.

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Applying to University

If university applications feel confusing, this talk will help you make sense of the process. From course choices to personal statements, learn how you can support your child.

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Revision Techniques That Work

Not all revision advice is useful. This talk focuses on the strategies that genuinely help students revise effectively, with practical ways to support without adding pressure.

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Staying Safe Online

Worried about the online world your teen is growing up in? This talk explores the issues parents worry about most, with practical advice you can actually use.

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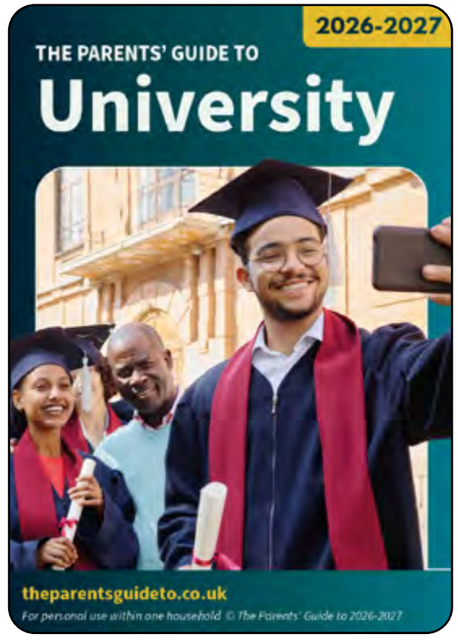
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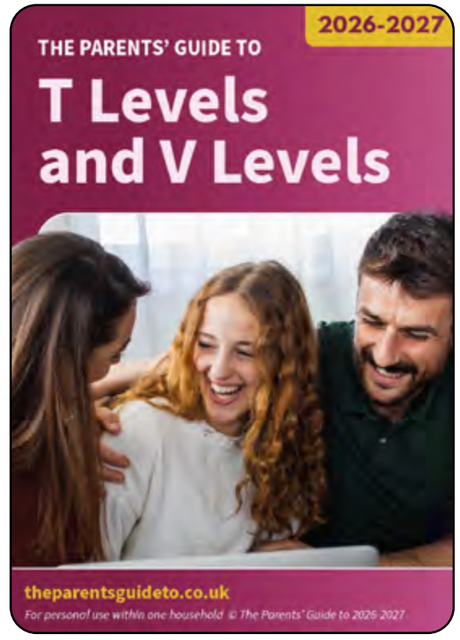
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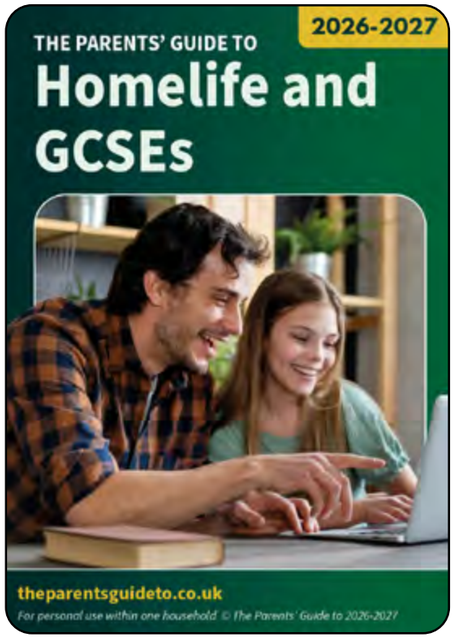






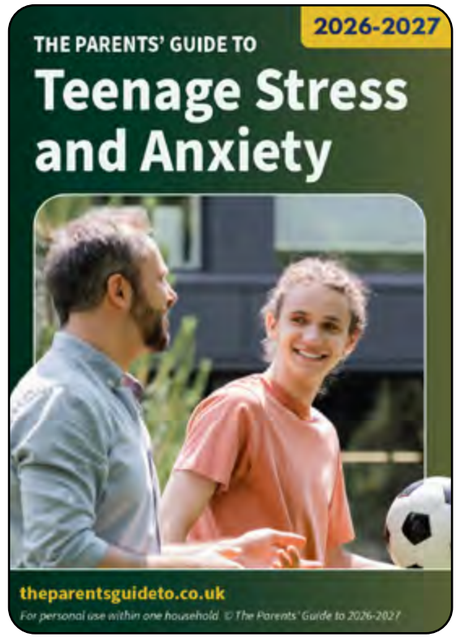












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