

Those feeling stressed at the mere mention of the HSC should spare a thought for Loraine Rushton. For more than a decade she's helped HSC students, at both private and public schools, reduce their stress through yoga and meditation. It can mean teaching at up to 15 schools a week before end-of-year exams.

"One school brought me in because year 12 students hadn't coped well the previous year; the counsellor had seen students in tears every week," the founder of Zenergy Yoga says.

Yoga and meditation offer practical tools to help the body and the mind.

"They absolutely need time out every week to learn to relax the body and de-stress. Students say they feel 100 per cent different afterwards," she says.

It's less about studying hard and more about studying smart.

Dr Rachael Murrily

While working with body, mind and breath is useful, there are plenty of alternatives available for those finding the HSC stressful.

Website reachout.com offers students myriad resources, while the Reach Out Teachers Network helps high school teachers support young people's mental health and emotional resilience.

"Teachers can download lesson plans mapped to curriculum outcomes in each state," the chief executive of the Inspire Foundation [the group behind Reach Out], Jonathan Nicholas, says.

Nicholas believes sharing concerns with others can make a big difference to stress levels.

"We recommend young people have conversations [with friends or parents] if they are feeling that things are out of control," he says, noting that parents can help by making sure their teenagers are aware of sites like reachout.com.

When it comes to study itself,



Be cool ... Felicity McCallum teaches meditation to students Kathryn Mansour, Cassandra Malechi, Stephanie Scalise and Natalie Jukic. Photo: Steven Siewert

Calmer approach to HSC anxiety pays off for year 12 student

FOR 17-year-old Natalie Jukic, there's simply no ignoring the workload of the looming HSC.

"There are so many topics I study," she says. "With that comes an immense [amount] of work. It's a huge amount of stress up front."

The year 12 student at Marist Sisters' College, Woolwich admits

she's a "stresser" but says she's found a number of ways to combat HSC anxiety.

"I write a list of all the things I have due soon, then tick them off," she says.

"It works because I can see everything so I'm not required to go back into my brain and recall it."

Nicholas says planning is the key. "Stress peaks when we don't manage our time well," he says.

University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) research consultant, Dr Rachael Murrily, agrees.

She works on a program (Taking Charge of Stress) that sees UTS experts provide HSC-coping strategies to more than 50 schools every year.

"It's less about studying hard and more about studying smart. You need to be a supreme manager of your time, have a study timetable and have rewards for your study," she says.

This means socialising comes after you've done the hard yards, not before. "We try to encourage people to use Facebook or TV as a reward you give yourself after doing one or

Jukic also credits her school meditation classes – run by youth ministry co-ordinator Felicity McCallum – with keeping her stress levels down.

"It's been great in helping us understand who we are," she says. "It's usually just 10 minutes at the start of class but I really feel

relaxed when I'm meditating, like all my stress and troubles have gone away in that moment."

She's already noticed it paying off. "It has helped me so much to focus," she says. "I think it's really important to have that time away so you're not always focused on the study; then I have a fresh mind."

two hours of work," she says. She believes students can have a life outside study if they adopt good strategies. "It's about a balanced lifestyle and not buying into the myth that HSC means you have to give up your life for a year.

"If you have really great time management you should be able to go to a movie on a Friday night, or a 30-minute walk every day but you

need to stick to your schedule like a doctor's appointment," she says.

LINKS

Reach Out Teachers Network: teachers.reachoutpro.com.au
 Student support: reachout.com
 Yoga and meditation: zenergyoga.com
 UTS programs: fls.org.au/schools2.asp