

5 signs your teen needs support before the IB hits

Quiet patterns that are easy to miss, and much easier to address early.

1 Homework and assignments get done, but only at the last minute.

Deadlines are met through panic, not planning. The IB's workload makes that pace impossible to sustain.

The plan lives only in their head, and “I’ll do it later” is the default. Planning is a skill, not a personality trait, and the part of the brain responsible for it is still developing through the teen years. Until now, school did the planning for them: a teacher said what was due and when. The IB removes that structure. Everything runs at once, and nobody sequences it. Teens aren’t careless. They have never been taught to work backwards from a deadline, and like most people, they underestimate how long things take. Without a system, urgency becomes the only thing that gets them started.

2 They go quiet about school. “Fine” becomes the answer to everything.

Confusion stays hidden until it has grown into a crisis.

Anxiety before graded work, such as tests and essays, rarely looks the same for everyone. It can look like avoidance, anger or shutting down. When the brain registers a threat, it prioritises protection over thinking, and that is exactly when recall and working memory suffer. The real driver is usually not the exam itself, but what the grade seems to say about them.

3

“I’m just bad at this” becomes their go-to line.

One bad grade turns into “I’m just not smart enough.”

A single setback becomes a statement about who they are, and that spiral does more damage than the grade. These sentences begin as a throwaway reaction to one bad moment. Then something quieter happens: the mind starts collecting evidence. Every poor result confirms the sentence, and every success gets explained away as luck. Repeated often enough, the statement stops feeling like an opinion and starts feeling like a fact. This is how identity forms. We act from our set of beliefs about ourselves, and our behaviour then reinforces them. A belief that does not serve a teenager, whether or not it is true, can quietly steer their effort, their choices and their willingness to try. Once these beliefs settle in, they are very hard to untangle, which is why the earlier they are noticed, the easier they are to change.

4

“I’ll do it later. I still have time.” “Oh, it’s so boring.”

Avoiding the task brings instant relief, and that relief teaches the brain to repeat it.

It sounds like laziness, but it isn’t. Research on procrastination points to emotion, not laziness and not a lack of motivation. People delay tasks that trigger uncomfortable feelings: fear of not being good enough, overwhelm, perfectionism, boredom, not knowing where to begin. The guilt afterwards adds more discomfort, which makes the next task harder to start. It is a loop of feeling, not a flaw of character, which is why pep talks and stricter rules rarely work. They treat the wrong cause.

5

Effort without results

They study hard, but nothing sticks.

Long hours at the desk, exhaustion, and “I studied loads and still got that grade.” Most teens study the way they have seen others do it: rereading, highlighting, copying notes. It feels productive because the material looks familiar, but familiar is not the same as remembered. The methods that build lasting memory, such as testing yourself, spacing sessions out and explaining ideas aloud, feel harder, so students drop them. More hours of the wrong method only means more exhaustion. And there is no single best method. What works depends on the student, the subject and how they think. Learning how you learn comes before working more.

Recognise two or more?

It’s worth a conversation, ideally before the IB starts, not after.

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