

How Do I Help My Teen Explore Careers?

Tips for supporting undecided teens and job seekers as they choose a career path

Recognize your own feelings and assumptions about career exploration.

Both you and your teen get information and opinions about career paths from family, friends and the media. Your opinions about education and work have the most influence on your teen. Be aware of the positive and negative messages you send about college, job training and specific career paths, including your own. Talk about how the classes taken and high school grades affect college and career options. Regardless of your own background, help your teen to achieve the education needed for career success.

Talk about your work.

Your teen probably doesn't know a lot about your college experience or work history. Even if you've discussed it, he or she might not really understand how your decisions and achievements over the years have led to your current position. When talking about your education and career, give details that can help your teen narrow their career choices. Discuss how the classes you took in high school helped build the skills and knowledge you use on the job. Talk about how each job you had led to the next one. Be honest about your mistakes. Share how decisions or negative activities might have impacted or limited your career options.

Emphasize the connection between education and careers.

Your teen's attitude about school can affect feelings about career exploration. Share that you do your best at your job every day and don't get a day off just because you feel like it. The same goes for school attendance and performance. Talk about how the classes he takes and his grades in high school affect his college and career options. Regardless of your own background, help your teen to achieve the education needed for his career success.

Help your child to develop work skills and values.

Does your teen understand that any type of job can give a person dignity, self-respect and teaches responsibility? Teens can learn these values for themselves by helping with household chores, volunteering, or with part-time or summer jobs. Those experiences teach work skills like time management, teamwork and decision-making. They also show your teen the value of politeness, work ethic, speaking skills, creativity and other skills employers want.

Encourage your child to explore career clusters before choosing one career pathway.

Teens might believe that there is only one career for them. If that career doesn't work out, they might feel that they have failed. Many different types of careers require similar tasks and skills. Once they have identified how their interest and abilities fit within one cluster, there will be many occupations within that Cluster to explore.

Be patient, and be ready.

Some people naturally start thinking about career exploration as young children. Some don't think about careers until their teens. And some adults still struggle to find the right career path for them. If your teen is not ready to make college or career decisions, be patient. Help your teen to identify life goals. The desire to reach those goals will fuel their career exploration. When your teen is ready to talk about careers, be prepared to help research colleges and careers. Career exploration resources are listed on page 19.



How Do I Help My Teen Make Career Plans?

Tips for assisting a teen or job seeker as they prepare for their chosen career path

Understand that career exploration is a process, not a one-time decision.

Be an advocate for your teen's career exploration. Encourage your teen to ask questions and research several career and education options. Remember that changing career goals and discovering new options before choosing one is part of the process. See page 18 for the steps involved in the career exploration process.

Help your teen define success.

A large bank account is not the only measure of success. Success can be defined by a feeling of purpose, strong ties to family and friends, financial independence, social standing and other ways. Ask your teen which achievements or lifestyle might be important to be considered successful.

Help your teen to "test drive" different careers.

Work-based learning and other career exploration activities allow a teen to explore a career before making a commitment. Internships, volunteer positions, job shadowing and work-site visits can give any job seeker a realistic look at a career. Also, encourage your teen to get first-hand knowledge by talking to people in different positions. These connections can be made through informational interviews, mentoring or joining professional organizations.

Encourage your teen to learn new skills.

Your high school probably offers classes that let your teen learn and apply technical skills, like keyboarding, automotive technology, accounting, graphic design, computer programming, marketing, agronomy or others. These classes increase college readiness and are impressive to employers.

Be persistent, but not pushy.

Constantly questioning your teen about career plans might make your teen think negatively about the whole career exploration process. Instead, gently ask about likes and dislikes. The discussion can then lead into how your teen's interests or goals fit into future plans.

Realize that not every career starts with a four-year degree.

No amount of education or type of degree can guarantee a successful career. However, most employers expect job seekers to have some type of postsecondary education or formal job training. Community and technical colleges have certificate and degree-awarding programs that prepare job seekers for career paths with many good-paying occupations. You should find out what type of degree or training is required for the Career Pathways your teen is interested in.

Expect your teen to have several occupations in a lifetime.

Statistics show that people change jobs approximately 10 times between ages 18 to 36. Even with a defined career goal, your teen will continue to reevaluate choices and make adjustments if needed. The goal is not for your teen to find one job at one company, but to find a career path and sets of skills that can be developed over a lifetime.

Come up with Plan B.

No matter how much thought someone puts into choosing a career, things often don't go exactly as planned. Changes in the economy, family issues, company restructuring, industry changes and other factors outside of a job seeker's control can have a major impact on a person's career goals. Helping your teen realize that "life happens" will encourage preparation for overcoming obstacles in the future.

Know where to go for information.

As a parent, you are not expected to become an expert career counselor or know details about hundreds of occupations. Guiding your teen through the career exploration process means that you know where to go to get information about college and careers. In addition to your high school counseling office, resources for career exploration are listed on page 19.

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