

Parents Make a Difference!

Who has the most influence over teens making career decisions? Parents do!

Research over the past 20 years indicates that parents play a major role in the career decision making of their sons and daughters. Parents are influential throughout childhood. You may not even be aware of the many ways you contribute to your child's early career development.

Parents are often the primary source of their children's work values and attitudes.

- Career decision making skills have been linked to early childhood experiences, family attitudes and practices regarding careers and role modeling by mothers and fathers.
- Parents' expectations and support contribute significantly in helping their children have the maturity to make career decisions.

Ask your children what they want to be when they grow up? Most likely you'll hear doctors, lawyers, professional ball player, model, actor, rock and roll singer, etc. The younger the child the more unrealistic the choice may be. In most cases, they don't know what these occupations do, but there is some aspect that captures their interest.

Accentuate the Positive

Do your children always seek out your advice and listen attentively as you try to give them assistance? Probably not! All parents want their children to succeed and to have a life better than their own. It's only natural for parents to want to influence their children's future. "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative".

- **Your attitude matters a great deal!** Stay positive! The work place today is ever changing and may seem scary to your children. Don't make the past seem perfect and the future terrifying. Knowledge is power. So, encourage your children to get as much information and take advantage of as many opportunities as possible.
- **Don't say no!** Don't shoot down ideas your children may have about their future careers. If you react negatively, it may shut down the whole communication process. Keep the lines open as you encourage them to gather as much information on a particular career as possible. That research may provide the results you would have imagined in the first place.
- **Jump on opportunities!** Informal discussions about the world of work with your child can be as productive as time that is scheduled. Jump on those "teachable moments: in conversations with your child.
- **Please do it "Their Way!"** Your goal is to help your children find their own way. By discussing interests, dreams and goals, you can get to know your children better. And, if their approach seems a little different than what you would do, remember – it's their way!
- **Step outside the Box!** Here's a chance to play sociologist or teacher and observe your child. What does she/he like or dislike? How do they work, play or interact

with others? This will help you see your child in a different light and provide you with valuable information to assist them.

Use these suggestions to help your child plan his/her future. Remember that it is your child's future! It is your role to separate your innermost desires and wishes from that of your child. Help them reach their own dreams.

The Steps to Making Career Decisions

The best way to begin career exploration with your children is by talking about your own career. What do you do in your job? What decisions did you make that led you to this point in your career? Teens aren't always overly interested when parents begin to share their wisdom with them. As a parent, you want to help guide your children as much as possible when making decisions that will impact their careers, but the questions are, "When do I begin?" and "How much do I offer?" There are many critical points where your children will need your assistance.

You can begin to discuss career exploration as early as elementary age to help build self-confidence and career awareness. A good activity to use with your children, regardless of age, is to discuss occupations that you observe in everyday life and what those jobs may entail. Teaching children responsibilities and the importance of completing tasks at an early age are skills they will use regardless of what career they choose to follow.

Step 1 – Learn More about Yourself

Teens – Take interest and ability assessments. You can learn about working in different environments with part time or volunteer work and by visiting different work sites. Visit www.florida.echoices.com to review various self-awareness activities.

Parents – Who knows your child better than you? Discuss his/her interests and dreams to help determine goals for the future.

Step 2 – Identify Some Possibilities

Teens – Explore a wide range of occupations in a variety of fields. Narrow the list of occupations by using criteria such as education level, salary, working conditions, etc. Research each occupation that you find interesting.

Parents – Help your child to explore a variety of options. Discuss the duties and tasks and requirements of different occupations. Review postsecondary opportunities that may include college, community colleges, technical centers, the military and apprenticeships.

Step 3 – Evaluate Your Options

Teens – analyze each occupation by comparing the negative and the positive aspects. How much education will you need? How will you pay for your education?

Parents – You and your child may also want to consider lifestyle implications and the overall impact on life for each option. For instance, will the job require irregular hours? Will the salary support the lifestyle your child wants? How much education does the

occupation require? It's important for your child to understand the relationship between lifestyle, occupations choice, and educational pursuits. Help your children understand and balance the difference between wants and needs.

Step 4 – Make a Choice

Teens – Decide on a general field of interest. There are many jobs that don't exist today but may in your future. It is still best to choose a career rather than a specific occupation to pursue. Think about the kind of lifestyle you want. Prepare a budget using the salary range of several occupations of interest. Will your potential earnings support your desired lifestyle?

Parents – encourage your child to explore a variety of career areas. The economy, demographics, and technology will continue to change the workplace. Some jobs become obsolete while other new jobs emerge. Some occupations may maintain the same title, but they may change or evolve so drastically that they no longer resemble what they were a decade earlier. As the workplace continues to change, it will be more important to focus on groups of similar skills and how they can be transferred from one occupation to another. Help your child to build a budget so that he/she understands what expense items will come out of a monthly income.

Step 5 – Create an Action Plan

Teens – Outline activities and develop a timetable to complete them. Design a career and education plan with the steps needed to achieve the career goal. Seek out opportunities for part-time work, job shadowing, volunteering, attending career fairs and other activities that will help you learn more about the workplace.

Parents – some schools have students complete a 4 year program of study for high school at the end of the eighth grade or early in the ninth grade. Planning and organization give direction to your children's future. Encourage your child to take challenging courses that include lots of math and science. If you haven't already started a savings plan for college, you will want to investigate financial aid and scholarship options. Financial aid should be considered as early as eighth grade (and financial planning during the elementary years, if not sooner). Why? Many of the scholarships will be based on achievement and required courses through the high school years.

Step 6 – Take Action

Teens – Make sure you follow your timeline. Review short and long-term goals and take steps to reach them. Update your plan as needed.

Parents – Encourage your child to stick with a rigorous school curriculum to build a strong foundation in math, reading, writing, computer skills and science. The stronger the foundation, the more career options will be available later in life.

Step 7 – Review and Revise

Teens – At the 10th grade level, you should have identified some options for what you plan to do after high school. The FCAT will be a critical test to pass this year, but you

will also need to start thinking about the SAT or ACT that is required by most colleges as part of the entrance qualifications. If college is part of your plan, the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) can help you identify any academic areas that you need to strengthen. Keep that career plan handy. You may experience many changes from 8th grade through each grade level in high school that impacts goals you set early on. Make adjustments as you go along.

Parents – As your child matures and gains more experiences, his/her interests may change. Course selection in high school can determine your child's course of action after graduation. For instance, if your child wants to go to college and she/he hasn't taken the required courses, remedial courses may be necessary. Help your child to stay on target by taking the necessary courses. Remember that all plans should be flexible in case your child wants to change some of the goal she/he set earlier on.

In the workplace of the 21st century, workers will need to be better educated to fill new jobs and more flexible to respond to the changing knowledge and skill requirements of existing jobs. It is projected that 65 percent of all new jobs created by 2010 will require some education and training past high school.

During the past two decades, the skills needed to succeed in the workplace have changed significantly. Basic skills such as reading, writing and math are a must. Technical skills are also important, but employers have begun to recognize that there is another set of skills that are crucial to a worker's ability to work "smarter, not harder." Frequently, these are referred to as "soft skills." What are employers saying that it takes to be successful? They want their employees to have;

- Flexibility – Adapt to changes in the work environment as opposed to coping with a stable work environment.
- Problem Solving – Solve unforeseen problems on the job as opposed to referring unforeseen problems to others.
- Teamwork – Do their best work in teams as opposed to doing their best work independent of others.
- Life Long Learning – Continue to expand skills as the company changes and grows rather than focusing entirely on specified duties and skills of their present job. Always be open to learning new ways of doing things.

Important personal qualities are responsibility, dependability, punctuality, attitude, self-esteem, sociability, self-management and honesty. These are skills that one develops at home, school and with other experiences. Parents play a big role in helping their children develop these attributes. For instance, encourage your children to be independent thinkers and problem solvers. Don't make all their decisions or solve their problems. Involve them in the process.

How Can Your Children Prepare For This Changing Workplace?

- Develop a career and education plan for high school that includes high school courses, graduation and postsecondary plans.

- Understand that the more education you get, the more job options become available.
- Focus on developing and identifying skills that can be transferred from one job to another.
- Develop employability skills that include resume writing, searching for a job and interviewing.

Life after High School

You can help your children to make informed decisions about education and training after high school. They should be aware of job opportunities available with a high school diploma and those that require more education. It is projected that by 2010, over 85 percent of all jobs will require some type of postsecondary education or training

Earning an AA Degree while still in High School

Yes, it's possible. Students can earn college credit while in high school. Many students are graduating from high school with a certificate or degree from a career and technical center or community college. Students can consider dual enrollment that allows them to enroll in college-level classes without the cost of registration, enrollment or laboratory fees. All the instructional materials are free, too. Students need a 3.0 GPA to enroll in college credit courses or a 2.0 GPA to enroll in career and technical certificate courses. Students will also need to pass the appropriate section of the college placement test. Students should see their school counselor for more information.

Types of Financial Aid

Scholarships – Assistance given based on academic performance and/or financial need. This money does not have to be repaid. The Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program has several award levels which can pay as much as 100 percent of tuition and fees at a Florida public institution and an equivalent amount at a private institution. Students can visit www.FACTS.org for a comparison of their transcripts with Bright Futures academic requirements.

Financial Aid Search Tools

www.florida.echoices.com

Florida CHOICES – Florida's career information system available at schools and Florida eCHOICES on the internet.

www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org

This is the site for the Florida Office of Student Financial Assistance and includes information about the Bright Futures Scholarship Program.

www.fafsa.ed.gov

Look here for the free application for the Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) that will start the entire process for applying for financial aid.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is career development and why is it important?

Career development is a life-long process that begins as early as four years old. It involves self-concept and awareness, career awareness and exploration, learning to make decisions, acquiring work skills and career planning. Career development includes values, interests, personality, aptitudes and interpersonal skills.

Should I tell my child what I think would be the best career choice for him/her?

We can help children understand themselves and provide support, but the choice must be theirs.

I don't have any expertise in career guidance. Shouldn't I just leave that up to the school?

Parents are the primary influence on their children's interests, beliefs, values, knowledge and self-concept. Support and encourage areas of interest and talent. Parents can instill a sense of respect for all types of work and workers. Be sure to talk about your own job. Help your children to experience activities that would expose them to different kinds of work.

How can my child acquire skills that can help prepare them for the workplace?

Skills are activities that can be learned or developed by education and/or training. Career and technical education courses taken in high school can help your child develop skills and workforce experience. Part time jobs can also give them work experience. Every job will require them to do certain activities or tasks and each task will require a variety of skills. Their skills will continue to increase over their lifetime.

How can I contribute to my children's work skills and values?

Let your children know that the work we do is important and necessary. Teach them the value of reliability, honor, dignity and effort in the work world and in their own self respect. Household chores, volunteering, and part time work can help young people develop these traits. These experiences teach responsibility, decision making skills and that there are consequences to the choices we make.

Should my children have decided what they want to do by the time they graduate from high school?

It is not uncommon that an 18 year old will be uncertain about what they want in a career. It is better for them to understand themselves well so that they can consider a number of occupations that reflect their interests. Statistics show that people between 18 and 36 years of age change jobs approximately 10 times. We usually evaluate our choices and if they don't fit our needs we make adjustments. Career choices are not always permanent.