

CAREER DECISION-MAKING

Why is career decision-making important?



"Most people don't plan to fail; they fail to plan."

— Author unknown

FACTS ABOUT CAREER DECISION-MAKING

- Career decision-making is a process.
- Career decision-making is a skill that can and should be taught.
- The goal of career decision-making is to help participants organize their thinking about topics important in choosing a career.
- It's important to assess one's style of decision-making to help overcome obstacles that might inhibit the process.
- Students should not expect to make a final career decision lightly.

The goal of career planning is to link academic knowledge and real-world experience to determine the path of one's future professional life.

Adapted from:

Career Choices in North Carolina, 2003 Career Development and User's Guide, Youth edition
[State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee]

PARENTING CAREER QUESTIONS 101

Why do I need to help my child explore careers?
My parents didn't help me and I turned out OK ...

Twenty or 30 years ago the need to plan for a career wasn't as urgent. It was more common for high school graduates to find good-paying jobs right out of school and work their way up the socio-economic ladder without further training. At that time, a college degree – in any given field – was seen as a ticket to success.

Times have changed! Today, positions in almost every industry require some type of post-secondary education or specialized training. Jobs that don't require additional training or education often don't lead to advanced positions or better pay. Today, entry-level employees are competing with workers overseas. It's the job candidates who have specialized skills and a career plan who have the best chances of long-term employment.

Won't locking my child into a specific career goal
at a young age narrow his or her options?

The aim isn't for your child to choose one particular occupation. It's to understand the selection process, narrow the list based on his interests and to ensure that his educational path doesn't limit his future options.



When can I find the time to help my child explore careers?

If you're like most parents, you're very busy. You work. You run a household. You drive kids to and from activities. Squeezing in one more activity seems hard to do. The reality, though, is that you **do** have time. Whether you're aware of it or not, you're already shaping your child's career development.

Every time you talk about your salary, your workday highs and lows, even your selection of work clothes, you send a message to your child about careers. What you do for a living, and how your child perceives it, all influence your child's vision about work.

Preparing your child for the world of work is a critical part of parenting – like a bird showing its offspring how to catch worms. Think about the messages you received about working when you were young. Your efforts to help promote your child's career exploration will be part of your legacy to him.

Adapted from
Starting the Conversation: Career Exploration Guide for Parents & Children
[by Texas Workforce Commission]

CONVERSATION STARTERS



The best way to begin career exploration is by using everyday conversations with your child to talk about your own career. Your child probably knows very little about your work history, unless you've taken him or her to work. And even then, he or she might not really understand what you do or the decisions and achievements that lead to your current position.

Begin by talking about ...

- ✓ What exactly do you do?
- ✓ Where did you acquire your skills?
- ✓ What did you have to learn for your job?
- ✓ What do you like best about your job?
- ✓ Talk about each job you've held and how it prepared you for the next one.
- ✓ Discuss what it is you liked most and least about each job.
- ✓ Be sure to include the education and training that you needed.
- ✓ Describe how your job has changed over time.
- ✓ Be honest about the mistakes you've made and hope your child will benefit from your experience.

Little kids **love** talking about possible jobs — the future seems wide open and full of adventure to them. Use this time to help your child explore some things they might or might not enjoy in a future job. These preferences often stay with people as they grow older and can have a positive influence of career and education choices.

As children get older, they become less interested in dreaming of the future and prefer living in the present. Teens often think negatively about having to work for a living. So, don't be surprised if your teen doesn't find career exploration interesting. They're influenced a great deal by other teens and by the media. Sometimes these messages might get in the way of successful planning. Be aware of what some of your teen's attitudes toward work and career exploration might be so that you can confront them, if need be.

It's likely your teen has heard that it's not cool to get good grades, that entry-level jobs don't matter, that office work is for "losers" or other mistruths. Such messages can make your child reluctant to explore certain career paths.

As a parent, it's up to you to counter these claims, to point out the value in all work and to show a realistic view of occupations. Demonstrate the hard work and perseverance that's needed to be successful in any job that might be considered easy or glamorous, like singing, athletics or even medicine.

Adapted from
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[Texas Workforce Commission]

CAREER PLANNING SUGGESTIONS








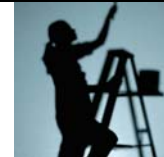
As parents, you are an *essential* resource for your son or daughter as they plan their future career. Below are suggestions to help you assist him or her in the career planning process.

- * Get involved in your child's education and encourage his or her teachers to integrate career exploration activities in the classroom.
- * Take time to **TALK** and **LISTEN** to each other.
- * Help your child build a positive self-concept.
- * Become aware of his or her interests, abilities and temperament.
- * Explore various occupations with your child.
- * Expand the range of career possibilities by eliminating gender bias from your child's perceptions.
- * Discuss your occupation and the steps you took during your career decision-making and planning process.
- * Use valuable career and education resources like *MnCareers*, ISEEK (www.iseek.org) or CareerOneStop (www.careeronestop.org).
- * Assist your child in developing a resume showing work experience, previous activities and volunteer experiences. Practice preparing an electronic portfolio (www.efoliominnesota.com).
- * Start saving now for your child's future needs. Explore the "Paying" section of the Web site: www.getreadyforcollege.org.



REMEMBER that your child is making his or her *own* decision. You are one valuable resource on his or her road to a happy and productive career.

CAREER PLANNING MYTHS

Myth:	There is one right job just for me ...
	<i>This is an age-old myth. There are numerous occupations for multi-faceted individuals where multiple talents can be applied. The nature of such possibilities only expands as work experience grows.</i>
Myth:	You must have experience to find a job ...
	<i>Not everyone needs experience to find a job. Most people are hired for their aptitude or potential to learn and advance within an organization.</i>
Myth:	Everyone starts their careers at age 21 and proceeds in a straight line toward their career goals.
	<i>It's rare that this will happen. Sure, some people's career paths lead down the straight and narrow, but most paths require changes of direction. In fact, the majority of people change jobs a minimum of six or seven times over the course of their lifetime.</i>
Myth:	Career planning is an irreversible process.
	<i>Simply not so. Career plans are revisited and refined all the time. You can change career directions whenever your talents, needs or resources dictate or allow.</i>
Myth:	There is a particular set of job responsibilities for every occupation.
	<i>Job duties are the result of the individual's capabilities and the needs of the individual's employer. People in positions that have the same or similar job title very often perform different tasks.</i>
Myth:	Choosing an occupation is difficult.
	<i>Choosing an occupation is a complex process that takes time, patience and research. It can be a satisfying experience. The guidance of family, teachers and counselors can help.</i>
Myth:	If I'm smart, I'll go to college, study hard and graduate. Then I'll get a good-paying job in my chosen profession.
	<i>Unfortunately, this is not always true. Getting a good-paying job in your chosen occupation depends on many factors, some of which you have no control over, like the economy, downsizing, competition or advancements in technology.</i>
Myth:	A 4-year college degree guarantees a good-paying job.
	<i>The truth is that no amount of education or type of degree "guarantees" a stable, good paying job. Community colleges and tech schools offer training for jobs that pay just as well, if not more, than jobs that require a four-year degree. The technical skills, education or training you need depends on the type of job and what those employers are looking for.</i>

Adapted from
[Minnesota Office of Higher Education]

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING MYTHS

Myth: Everyone should go to college.



College is not for everyone. It's fair to say that most people need some type of training beyond high school, but not everyone needs to go to college to get that training. No one should attend college because they feel it's their only option. There are several options besides college.

Myth: College costs too much. There's no way my family and I can pay \$15,000-\$20,000 for tuition.



Despite rising tuition costs, not all colleges are that expensive. In fact, few schools charge \$20,000 per year. Most Minnesota public colleges and universities charge tuition and fees under \$5,500 per year. And remember, many types of financial aid are available.

Myth: My family and I can't save anything on our income. College is out of the question.



Even if you save only a few dollars a month, you can reduce the cost of college — especially if you start when your child is young. Get in the habit of saving a few dollars a week and let your savings grow over time.

Myth: It's too late for me. I haven't saved anything and I don't have time to save now.



It's never too late. During college, many students work to offset the cost and you might be eligible for financial aid in the form of grants and scholarships. To find out, complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form and submit it promptly. Federal tax credits for higher education and deductions in student loan interest make paying for college costs easier. And, although loans are the least desirable option, they are available to make college affordable.

Myth: It won't do my family or me any good to save because saving will only reduce my chances for financial aid.



Actually, the penalty is very small. Under current law, the maximum amount of aid you can lose is \$5.65 for every \$100 of savings.

Myth: Our family income is too high to receive aid, but we can't afford the full cost of college. There's no assistance available for me.



It's true — some families are not eligible for grants. However, there is assistance available. There are tax benefits, low-interest loans or scholarships based on academic achievement, talent, merit or other criteria.

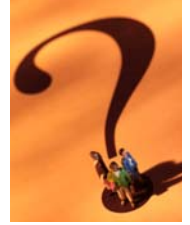
Adapted from
[Minnesota Office of Higher Education]

PARENT PRIMERS

Here are some Frequently Asked Questions by parents regarding career information:

How can I be a good role model for my children in career development?

Be proud of the work that you do and the contribution you make to the family and community. If possible, allow your children to visit you at your job.



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

Let your child know that the work you do is important and necessary. Teach them the value of reliability, honor, dignity and self respect. Household chores, volunteering and part-time work can help young people develop these traits. Experience teaches responsibility, decision-making skills and that there are consequences to the choices individuals make.

Should my child know what he or she wants to do by the time they graduate from high school?

It's not uncommon that a 18-year old will be uncertain about what they want in a career. It's better for him or her to understand oneself well, so that he can consider a number of occupations that reflect ones interests. Statistics show that people ages 18 to 36 change jobs approximately 10 times. As we evaluate our life choices, we make adjustments if they don't fit our needs. The same goes for career choices – they're not always permanent.

How can I help my child understand how career choice impacts lifestyle?

If your child "values" a lifestyle that includes travel, luxury cars, an expensive home and lots of other material possessions, then a career that supports such a lifestyle is important. Labor market information provides salary levels that can be expected given the occupation, experience and educational level. But remember that motivation is also a factor. Be sure to use labor market information and discuss material "wants" versus "needs" (use Worksheet #15, page 95).

How can my child experience different careers?

It might be a good idea for your child to "test drive" different careers. Hospitals, libraries, churches, professional and civic associations all have multiple opportunities for volunteers. Also encourage your child to talk to people in different positions to get first-hand knowledge.

My daughter wants to be a carpenter or work in construction and my son wants to work as a nurse. I feel these jobs are not suited for either of them. How do I advise them?

It's an old belief than men are better at some things and women are better at others. This belief has caused many women in the past to hold lower-status or lower-paying jobs than men with the same amount of education. Times have changed and you will see men and women in all areas of the workforce. Men are also choosing occupations previously dominated by women, such as nurses, hair stylists or secretarial work. It's important to find a job that matches an individual's interests rather than excluding occupations because of gender.

Why should my child explore career clusters? Doesn't a person simply decide on ONE job?

Children might believe that there is only one career for them. And if that career doesn't work out, they might feel they're inadequate or a failure. Many different careers require similar tasks and skills. If their interest and abilities match one cluster, they might be other occupations within that cluster that match their interests and skills.

Adapted from
Parent Primer on Career Exploration
[Florida Department of Education]

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

While your child is in school and preparing for the future, you can reinforce the career development activities at school. Use the following checklist to assess your child's career development needs and goals.

Parent Checklist

- Does your child's school have a career development plan for your child? Has your son or daughter been assigned a career counselor at school? Do they have access to a career center?
- Is your child following a sequential course of study?
- What career assessments has your child taken? What career fields do the results suggest?
- From what you know about your child's interests, abilities and personality, are you in agreement with the results of the career assessment?
- Do you know which occupations your child is interested in exploring?
- Have you visited the school's library or career center or searched the Internet to gather information about various occupations?
- Have you taken your child to work with you or exposed him or her to the world of work through community programs, internships, mentoring or job shadowing experiences?
- Are your child's career dreams realistic in terms of his or her aptitudes and personality?
- Have you explored all the post-high school options for your child — college, the military, apprenticeship programs, training and work?
- Do you know the requirements for admission to the colleges your child is considering?
- Have you visited college campuses or taken virtual tours online? Or have you viewed college videos with your child?
- Do you know where to access scholarship information?
- Have you started to save money for your child's higher education?
- Have you discussed the cost of college with your child?
- Have you gathered information about financial aid options, or advice on costs and saving for Minnesota schools?

Adapted from
Youth and Career Decisions (J. Davis and M. Dickmeyer) and
Get Ready for Your Child's Higher Education [MOHE].

THE BIG PICTURE: LABOR MARKET TRENDS



The world of work has changed dramatically over the past 40 years, and it continues to change with each new technological breakthrough. So what does this mean in terms of your child's employment future?

Your child is going to enter a service-oriented and knowledge-based economy where specific knowledge sets and the ability to learn matter more than physical abilities. Competition for jobs is global, and layoffs or job changes are commonplace. Your child will have a better chance of success if he is aware of the labor market he is entering.

Features of a New Economy

Companies lay off workers even in good times. During the record-low unemployment of the late 1990s, layoffs and turnovers were the highest on record. Today's workers must to be prepared for a very dynamic labor market.

Tenure doesn't always matter. Employers no longer automatically keep workers who've been at the company the longest. Instead, work skills and the ability to interact well with others matter more than actual time on the job.

Accomplishments do matter. Employers often rely on employee performance to determine who to promote or keep. Forty percent of companies now base compensation on performance, compared to just 17 percent just 10 years ago.

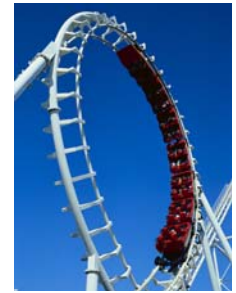
Ongoing education and lifelong learning is crucial. Since technology can change jobs dramatically, workers have to be flexible – able to learn new skills or shift occupations and careers as needed.

Many jobs continue to move overseas. Now that e-mail, faxes and teleconferencing are commonplace, Minnesota workers are not only competing for jobs with people in other states, but with workers from other countries as well. While many new jobs are created, other are moving overseas. As a result, most growing jobs in the U.S. are service-related.

Adapted from
Starting the Conversation: A Career Exploration Guide for Parents and Children
[Texas Workforce Commission]

TODAY'S JOB MARKET

Have you heard phrases like "It's a whole new world out there," or "This is not your parent's job market?" Many widely held beliefs about choosing a career, finding a job or even "life" in the workplace have changed significantly in recent years. Review the THEN & NOWs about the job market to gain a clearer picture of what job seekers are facing today and in the future.



THEN
A college education was a near-guarantee of a high-paying job right graduation.
College graduates could start in a high-level position in a company based on the degree alone.
High-paying jobs were almost the exclusive domain of people with four-year bachelor's degrees.
Once you got a good job, your best option was to stay in that position or with that company for life.
Manufacturing jobs were plentiful, paid well and didn't require a post-high school education.
A high school diploma qualified you for many jobs that could provide a good income.
Be loyal to the company and it will take care of you, now and in your old age. If you go to college and get a degree, you've got it made.

NOW
Now, college degrees are less important to employers than specific skills or training. Wages also vary a lot depending on the industry or field.
Graduates often need work experience in the field to get hired. They often need to take an entry-level job to start out.
More good-paying jobs don't require the traditional four-year college degree, but they <i>do</i> require some type of post-high school training.
Changing jobs is commonplace and often results in higher income growth. Most people change careers at least five to seven times in their life. You must manage your own career on an ongoing basis.
Manufacturing jobs are in decline and those that remain are not as secure or high-paying as in the past.
Post-high school training and career planning are essential for earnings and career advancement. They also increase the chances of being employed long term.
The <u>only</u> guarantee is that there are <u>no</u> guarantees. Layoffs and downsizing put job security and retirement plans at risk. It's up to you to manage your career and save for your own retirement.

Adapted from
Utah Adult Career Guide 2002-2003
 [Utah Career Resource Network]

CHANGES IN SKILL REQUIREMENTS – SOFT SKILLS

The 21st century workplace will require workers to be better educated, better skilled and have the flexibility and ability to meet changes in knowledge and skill requirements.

During the past two decades, the skills needed to succeed in the workplace have changed significantly. Basics, such as reading, writing and math, are a must in any occupation. Technical skills are also important. But increasingly employers have begun to recognize that another set of skills are just as crucial to a potential worker's ability. These skills are frequently referred to as "soft skills."



Soft skills are the personality traits, social graces and attitudes that employers in all industries value in the workplace and that help a person to have career success.

What soft skills are employers saying are needed to be successful? What skills do they want employees to have?

Soft Skills in Demand

Flexibility

The ability to adapt to changes in the work environment as opposed to coping with a stable work environment.

Problem Solving Skills

The ability to solve unforeseen problems on the job as opposed to referring unforeseen problems to others.

Teamwork

The ability to do one's best work in a team-orientated fashion, as opposed to working independently.

Life-Long Learning

The ability to continue to expand skills as the company changes and grows rather than focusing on specified duties and skills of one's present job. In short – always be open to learning new ways of doing things. This includes formal training and informal of self-taught skills.

Adapted from
Parent Primer on Career Exploration
[Florida Department of Education]