

How Can I Talk to My Teen About Careers?

You play an influential role in helping your teen to make career choices. Below are some tips about how to prepare for and approach career conversations constructively.

Our role

Some teens struggle to know where they want to head in life - many young people don't have a strong sense of this until their 20s. Nevertheless, society demands they make pathway choices sooner. While it's difficult to witness angst in our teens around career decisions, we can't, and shouldn't, choose for them. Our role is to guide their development by fostering their engagement and curiosity, and helping them to better understand themselves and their world.

Set the scene

Career conversations are most helpful when they're ongoing rather than a one off, so we need to take every opportunity available. Most teenagers respond well to casual conversations, with some good times including:

- In the car
- Over dinner
- While watching TV
- At subject selection time
- When helping with homework

Give your full attention, listen actively, and offer encouragement.

Mindset matters

Communicating from a set of flexible and

positive mindsets helps teens develop optimism about the future:

Believe in them

- Let them know you believe they are capable and resourceful.
- Reflect and reinforce their strengths, skills, and achievements.
- Assure them they will find satisfaction throughout their career.

Put things in perspective

Encourage them to:

- Focus on the journey rather than the destination.
- Explore their preferred future/s, rather than deciding what they want to be and do for the rest of their life.
- Believe there are many careers they will be good at and be satisfied with, rather than thinking there is only one 'best' option to pursue.
- Understand they only need to choose their next steps, not their entire life path, as they will encounter change along the way.

Expect and accept change

- Young people frequently change their mind about what they want to do.
- This is positive because it shows they are exploring their options and that

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they are open to various possibilities.

- Remind them they will likely have multiple jobs across different industries, so it's important to expect and prepare for change.

Turn negatives into positives

- A subject, job, course, or pathway choice that doesn't turn out as hoped can be a helpful learning experience - it's not going to ruin their future.
- Learning what they don't like and don't want to do helps teens clarify their preferences.
- Remind them they have time to re-assess their interests and broaden their options.

Reflect and share

Even though the world has changed since you were their age, your teen will benefit from learning about your experience. Reflect on and share:

- How you imagined your future when you were their age.
- If your life now is how you imagined it would be.
- How you made important make career decisions and who influenced you.
- Which chance events have contributed to where you are now.

Be willing to tell them the positives and the negatives, and how you coped with challenges. Encourage the other adults in your teen's life to also share openly.

Ask the right questions

The way we pose questions has an effect on the ease and outcome of the conversation.

Avoid	Try
<p><i>What do you want to be when you grow up?</i></p> <p><i>What are you going to do when you leave school?</i></p> <p>These assumes there is only one answer, and they can be daunting for those without answers.</p>	<p><i>When you were little, you wanted to ____. What seemed appealing about that job?</i></p> <p><i>What options are you considering for your future?</i></p> <p>These are less confronting and allow the conversation to open up.</p>
<p><i>What are your strengths/ weaknesses /skills? What are your achievements? What do you value/ what's important to you? What motivates you?</i></p> <p>These can be hard for young people to identify and articulate.</p>	<p><i>What do you enjoy? What do you like to do? What are your favourite subjects? What do you like about these things? What are you proud of? What do you feel strongly about?</i></p> <p>If your teen has difficulty answering these, try asking how their friends would answer these questions about them, or what compliments they've received.</p>

Another idea is to ask your teenager to use their imagination and think about a day at their 'dream job'. Ask them what they're doing, who they're with, where they are, what they're wearing and using, and what they like about their job, to reveal some helpful insights.