



Parents as Career Coaches

# Parent Guide

## Senior High

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Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

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# Introduction

Parents as Career Coaches is a program that helps parents, other family members, mentors, and other adults who endeavor to assist them in their career-development journey. You have already developed many skills required of a good coach. These skills—along with information, resources, and tips—will assist you in helping youth make the transition from school to work.

One of the resources available to parents is this parent guide. It has been designed to

- provide you with important information on the career-development process
- assist you in helping youth to use the student workbook and other resources
- ensure that youth make informed course selections and career decisions

# The Career Journey

The career journey is not a straight line. It is full of twists, turns, and surprises. It takes time for a young person to decide what they want to be. However, the time and effort put into the journey can result in their finding happiness and satisfaction in both their careers and life.

The high school years are a very important period in the career journey. Among other things are the many questions that youth need to consider and answer, including

- What am I interested in?
- What skills do I have?
- What courses should I take?
- What do I want to be?
- What are the steps leading to an occupation?
- Should I consider apprenticeship or go to university or community college?
- Will I need a student loan?
- Can I get a scholarship or bursary?
- Where do I go to get information?

## *Coaching Roles and the Journey*

**As a coach, you can help youth find answers to these questions during this part of the career journey. You can do this by adopting the three roles of a career coach: to clarify, to help with research and making connections, and generally to support the young along the journey.**

**CLARIFIER** – In this role you will

- talk to the youth about what makes them happy and what activities they are interested in
- use a variety of exercises and resources to help the youth identify their interests
- help the youth identify their skills
- help the youth understand the career process and the world of work

**CO-RESEARCHER/CONNECTOR** – In this role you will

- help the youth to identify occupations that might be of interest to them
- assist the youth in expanding their knowledge of what occupations exist
- use a variety of resources to help the youth find out more about occupations they show interest in, including
  - using information on the Internet
  - using the student workbook
  - gaining information through talking to others and having experiences that help them to discover more about careers that interest them
- encourage the youth to keep their options open through course selection in high school, but to consider, realistically, whether the courses they choose are interesting to them and will help them prepare for the career field(s) they are considering
- help the youth make decisions regarding training and careers

**SUPPORTER** – In this role you will

- provide the youth with help in identifying and securing financial assistance, if they decide to go on to post-secondary study
- continue to provide them with encouragement and the necessities of life

### ***Important Considerations for Career Coaches***

The world has changed dramatically since you were a youth, and so has the world of work. As a result, there are several important points to consider to effectively coach youth throughout the career journey, including the following:

**Your youth is not you.**

Their world and values may be very different from yours. Be aware that your own beliefs and attitudes are not necessarily going to match theirs. It will become important to avoid encouraging your youth to live out your dream rather than go in the direction they want. Resist the temptation to say things such as “That won’t pay the bills” or “Be practical,” or to make other comments that may cause your youth to tune out, shut down, or feel pressured into a decision they do not want to make.

### **Your youth has not lived your life experiences—yet.**

Did you know what you wanted to be when you were 18? Are you now doing what you chose at that age? Maybe not. It takes time to discover who you are and who you want to become. Part of that discovery—painful though it may be—may involve wrong choices, detours, and setbacks. Patience truly is a virtue, and it is needed as you watch your youth go through their own process of self-awareness and career exploration.

### **Encourage your youth to seek new experiences.**

Ideally, your youth's volunteer work, part-time jobs, or co-op experience should be interesting and helpful in developing practical skills. Even "drudge" jobs help to develop responsibility and time-management, teamwork, and social skills—not to mention the realization that "I don't ever want to do that job again." Experiences build upon one another and provide youth with knowledge needed to judge their capabilities and enlarge their career picture. Share some of the ups and downs from your own work life if doing so might be helpful. (Try to avoid "When I was your age ..." stories, or a superior-sounding approach.)

### **Take an interest in your youth's life.**

What school subjects does your youth like? Dislike? What hobbies, pastimes, and extracurricular activities do they enjoy? What are their favourite books, movies, TV shows, and websites? Whom and what do they admire? Offer your own observations in broad terms, like "I've noticed your friends like coming to you for advice" or "You seem to really enjoy tinkering with electronics." That way, you are recognizing and supporting your youth's apparent interests and show that you want them to be free to be themselves and explore careers that might be fulfilling and enjoyable. Your intention will be to avoid making assumptions about your youth's interests and future.

### **Walk the fine line between stimulating your youth's interests and overloading them.**

Some youth need to be nudged to try something they do not think they would like or can handle. Others have to be reined in. You do not want your youth's grades to suffer at the expense of part-time jobs and after-school activities. Nor do you want them to miss out on sports, clubs, pastimes, and work experiences. What's enough? What's too much? Help your youth to find a reasonable balance between their outside interests, work, and their academic life.



**Insist on persistence.**

Instill in your youth the attitude of doing their best at whatever they attempt and sticking with it even if it doesn't come easily. Toughing out a role on the sports team, music lessons, or a hard course for the year develops self-discipline and perseverance. That is a valuable life lesson, not least when first jobs may be short on "fun" and long on hard work.

**Know what courses your youth is taking.**

Your youth can get a high school graduation diploma with a wide range of compulsory and elective courses these days, but the course selection may not be enough to get them into the college or university program of their choice. Even in university, youth may choose courses according to how they fit into a timetable or how heavy the workload is. Make sure your youth knows how their course choices now could affect their options in the future.

**Discuss money matters with your youth.**

Does your youth know how much rent, groceries, and car maintenance cost? Do they have a bank account, including savings? Do they have to cost-share more expensive purchases? Have they researched what it costs to go to college and how finance it (e.g., student loans, living at home)? Lessons in money management go a long way toward getting your youth thinking about the realities of being independent.

**Provide your youth with feedback.**

Praise your youth's everyday efforts and successes (e.g., sharing the household chores, volunteer work, juggling school and a part-time job). To feel hopeful about the future, youth need to feel competent in the present. This is doubly important if academics are not your youth's strong suit. Casual, or passing, acknowledgements go a long way to giving your youth concrete information about their special talents and qualities. The hard thing about feedback, though, concerns how and when to point out that minimal effort is not good enough, or how to guide youth when they do not have a particular talent for something they love. Youth who do not get honest (but gentle) feedback on their weaknesses often miss opportunities to improve or reconsider their areas of strength. As adult workers, they may in consequence be more prone to defeatism when things go wrong.

Believe your youth can make decisions that are right for them. Decision making is a skill that improves only if it is practiced. If youth are allowed to make manageable decisions

of increasing importance as they mature, they will have a better chance of making effective education and work decisions when they get older. Let your youth make their own choices, but give them the benefit of your experience and advice. Once they have made a decision, encourage them to act upon and be responsible for that decision.

An important role of a career coach is to help the young person make an informed decision. In fact, information is very important with respect to making a positive decision. Ensuring our youth researches the facts will increase the chance that the decision made is the correct one. Youth, however, sometimes ignore the facts and make impulsive choices that have a negative consequence. When this happens, it is much easier to go back to the facts and analyze why a different decision should have been made. Despite obvious difficulties, mistakes can be beneficial, as they can create learning opportunities. It is possible your youth might fail a course, quit college, or get fired from a job. When such events happen, the less time spent dwelling on them the better. Try to find a middle ground between ignoring the issue and dwelling on it. Use each setback as an opportunity to help them analyze what happened, why, and what strategies might be used to promote future success.

# Using the Student Workbook

## *Pointers for Helping Your Youth*

The student workbook has been designed for youths to complete exercises on their own or with the help of a coach. It is important, when they finish, to discuss results and possible next steps or actions. Here are two possible basic approaches you could use.

### **Independent Approach**

This approach works well for youth who

- have good reading-comprehension skills
- are able to make decisions
- are good at following written instructions
- like working by themselves

This approach will encourage you as a parent to first discuss the purpose of the exercise with your youth, stressing that answers in the workbook are neither right nor wrong. They then complete the exercise and share their answers with you.

### **Co-work Approach**

This approach works well for youth who experience any one or more of the following:

- difficulties with understanding what they read
- a diagnosed or suspected learning challenge that would make the task difficult to complete on their own
- challenges working by themselves
- a physical challenge that would make paper-and-pencil tasks difficult

Using this type of approach, you and your youth will read the instructions together. To ensure that your youth understands what they are to do, you may want to ask them some questions. If they do not understand a specific word or a statement, you should try to explain it in words that make sense to them.

**It is critical, when using this approach, that you do not influence your youth's answers. For example, you should not give your opinion or make remarks about their answers.**

## ***Scheduling Career-Development Time***

In this fast-paced world, both parents and youth often have very hectic schedules. While helping youth along on their career journey is important, so are many other activities in your lives. Ensuring that career development remains one of the important priorities is critical. Therefore, it is recommended that you and your youth set up a weekly schedule to work on some of the activities and chat about careers.

Career development through this program is an ongoing process. In other words, simply completing the exercises in the workbook does not mean that the journey or task is complete. It is important to set some type of schedule and pace that will work for both of you. It is recommended that time be set aside each week. This could vary from one to two hours, depending on your schedules. The important point is for both of you to schedule and agree upon a specific, regular time.

### **Action Plan**

The Action Plan in the student workbook is an excellent tool to ensure that students remain focused on the career journey and actively participate.

It is recommended that students develop one action task per week. The key is to ensure that it is achievable. Perhaps you can review the Action Plan together weekly to see whether the task is being worked on or has been completed.

As a coach, you could also be assigned tasks on the Action Plan (e.g., arranging for the youth to talk to someone in a career they are interested in).

## ***Introducing the Student Workbook to Your Youth***

It is strongly recommended that you do not simply give your youth the student workbook without some type of initial discussion. Some of the points you might want to stress are as follows:

- They are in high school now and in a short while will need to make some decisions about a career.
- You have taken the PACC program to try to better understand how you can help your youth.

- Since it is their life and will be their decision in terms of a career goal, it is important that they begin to think about what types of training or work they might like to do in the future.
- Suggest that this workbook will be helpful to them in making career decisions.
- Emphasize that you will be there to talk to about what they discover and will try to help in any way you can.

### Step-by-Step Guide to Using the Student Workbook

The flow, pace, and order of activities and discussion will vary from youth to youth. However, here is a list of steps that will outline how you can assist your youth in using the student workbook.

Step	Tips for Coaching
<b>Step 1</b> Prepare	Review the parent guide and other materials from the PACC program. Read the student workbook. Visit the suggested websites to become familiar with them.
<b>Step 2</b> Introduce the student workbook to the youth	Refer to the suggestions listed above.
<b>Step 3</b> Career Map	The Career Map provides the youth with an overview of the career-development journey. It also allows them to assess where they are in the journey now and to update the map as they progress. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chat with your youth about the map.</li> <li>• Perhaps describe how your career journey went, using the map.</li> <li>• As you see your youth progressing, encourage them to go back to the map and update it.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note</b></p> <p>It is not unusual for someone to be at more than one point on the map. For example, someone might be exploring who they are but also researching occupations.</p>

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**Step 4**

## Exploring

The Exploring Your Interests section contains three exercises.

- The first exercise is a checklist that has been designed to encourage youth to think of numerous possible interests.
- The second exercise asks youth to identify activities they like, both in school and outside of school.
- The third exercise asks youth to identify activities they like in school.
- After completing these exercises the youth should transfer the answers (interests) to the “My Interests List”

**Tips**

- Coaches are encouraged to chat with their youths about the exercises and their answers.
- It would also be helpful to point out interests that appear repeatedly. These may later prove to be important interests.
- If the youth encounters difficulty identifying what they like about an activity, you might be able to assist them through further questioning and discussion.

**Note**

Encourage your youth to revisit these exercises to determine if their interests have changed over time.

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**Step 5**Identifying  
Possible  
Careers

The ability to identify potential occupations is a critical step in the career journey. This is one of those steps during which coaches are encouraged to work closely with the youth. The key to success in this step is to ensure that interests are used to create a list of potential occupations.

The three exercises in the Exploring Interests section of the *Student Workbook* will be used as a basis for generating potential interests. The process is as follows:

- Student creates a list of interests and records these on the “List of Interests” page in the student workbook. This involves writing down all the interests they checked off and all their “what I liked” answers regarding school and non-school activities.
- Once the list is complete, they then are asked to review it and select the two words or phrases that best describe their strongest interests.

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**Step 5  
continued...**

Identifying  
Possible  
Careers

The youth is then advised to use the same approaches that parents use in the PACC program.

Specifically, your youth is challenged to

- identify occupations that relate to the two interests they identified
- brainstorm alone and then with you to identify occupations
- record occupations on the “List of Occupations to Research” page of the *Student Workbook*

The youth is then asked to pick the one occupation from this list that they like the most. Once this is identified, they will

- locate the cluster or clusters that this occupation falls in
- transfer the name of any occupation they like, want to know more about, or have no knowledge of from the cluster list to the “List of Occupations to Research”

Web Resources can also be used to identify occupations that the youth might like.

- Using the school career software program or the link to online government quizzes, the youth can complete assessments.
- Once completed, these programs will generate lists of occupations that may be of interest to your youth. If they are interested in any of these occupations, they are asked to add these to the “List of Occupations to Research.”

**Tips**

- If the youth agrees, family members, friends, and others can be invited to participate in the brainstorming activity. The more input, the more likely that potential occupations, which might have been missed, will be identified.
  - Parents and students should not be alarmed at the length of the list. Eventually, the list will be reduced, through research, more life experiences, etc.
  - Parents should reinforce that this is a list of possibilities and that, at this point, the youth is not required or encouraged to commit to any of these occupations.
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**Step 6**Exploring  
Your Skills

The Exploring Your Skills section has been designed to assist the student in becoming aware of their skills and rating them. The two skill areas emphasized here are personal management and transferable skills.

The following section is called, What Do Employers Want? It provides an opportunity for the student to see how the skills they just rated relate to what employers are looking for. This will help to create an awareness of this important piece of career information and also to motivate the student to work on skills they feel are not strong.

**Tips**

- It is very important to take the time to review your youth's responses with them.
  - Parents should point out to the youth any skill areas they see as stronger than how the youth rated them. Sometimes youth lack confidence and underestimate their abilities. When the youth has underestimated a skill, the parent should provide the youth with examples of why they feel that skill is stronger than the youth thinks it is.
  - Some youth tend to overrate their skills. While it is important not to criticize, the parent should ask the youth why they rated this skill as strongly as they did and encourage them to provide examples and evidence. This should be discussed after the student has completed all skill assessments, to avoid influencing their initial ratings.
  - Another important discussion to have with your youth is about ways to help to strengthen certain skills. Any ideas agreed upon should be written into the Action Plan in the student workbook.
  - Discussing what employers want can assist youth in making choices. Parents might also be able to relate certain skills to what their own employer wants.
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**Step 7**Researching  
Careers

Research is a critical point that will have a notable impact on the choices your youth makes. Your involvement in Step 7 will be critical. Researching careers is an ongoing process, one governing initial career choices and, once in the workforce, affecting future decisions. The process is as follows:

- Your youth will select an occupation from the “Occupations to Research List.”
  - They will use a variety of web-based resources to learn more about the occupation. It is recommended you or the youth speak to someone at school to get access to the most up-to-date web resources.
  - It is also recommended that the youth speak to people who work in occupations they are interested in and attend career fairs.
  - Further research can include taking part in experiences like co-op courses, volunteering, part-time work, youth apprenticeship, skilled trades, the Options and Opportunities Program, etc.
  - At any time, the youth can decide that an occupation is one they do not want to pursue. They can cross it off their “Occupations to Research List.”
  - After initial research of an occupation, it should be placed on the “Potential Occupations List” if the youth is still interested in it.
  - The youth should not feel they are committing to anything until they are certain.
  - There should be ongoing research of these occupations.
  - They can be used to inform course selection, so that students are making sure they will be in a position to pursue these occupations.
  - The “Potential Occupations List” will change over time. Eventually, the list will get shorter as the youth conducts more research, learns more about themselves, and gains experience. This will make future decisions about post-secondary and career paths a bit easier.
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# The Ongoing Role of a Career Coach

Once your youth has started adding occupations to the “Potential Occupations List,” the process continues. The following is a list of activities you can use to keep them engaged in the career-development process:

- Continue encouraging your youth and providing opportunities for them to explore more about themselves. This can be accomplished by encouraging them to revisit some of the interest exercises they previously completed in their student workbook.
- As your youth gathers more information, has discussions with you, and discovers more about themselves, they may want to delete some of the occupations from their Potential Occupations List. At the same time, they may want to add new occupations to the list because of a new awareness or understanding they have gained. Current career websites might be particularly useful in finding out about new occupations.
- Throughout high school, it is suggested that you and your youth review the education requirements for occupations that remain on the list. Discuss what types of courses they would need to complete in high school if they were to choose a specific career goal. They may discover, for instance, that specific science, mathematics, or language courses are required. They may also discover that, to work in a specific career, they would need to go to community college or university. It is often helpful to talk with a guidance counsellor or post-secondary staff who can assist in identifying potential course needs.

## **Important**

For a variety of reasons, not all youth will be able to cope with the academic demands of certain high school courses or with post-secondary education. While this may eventually eliminate the possibility of pursuing specific occupations, there will be related occupations the youth might eventually pursue. For example, a youth may wish to become a veterinarian but lack the skills to cope with the academic demands. However, occupations related to the field of interest, such as that of veterinary assistant or animal-care attendant, that might also be appealing. As a coach, your role will be to help the youth to identify related occupations or find someone who can, such as a guidance counsellor, or even a career counsellor.

# PACC Articles

## High-Five Messages for Parents

### ***Change Is Constant***

Occupations come, go, and change. People change too. It is no longer realistic to expect that most young people will choose an occupation, train for it, and do that sort of work for the rest of their life. Young people must still plan for their future, but they can no longer afford to plan with a rigid attitude: “I’ve made a decision; now that’s settled.”

Real career resilience lies in being adaptable in the face of change. Youth need to learn to expect that there will be change. They need to become conscious of some of the changes that are going on all around them. And they need to be able to recognize and seize opportunities that come their way—many purely by chance.

### ***Follow Your Heart***

If change is constant, the heart is relatively stable. Heart refers to the qualities—interests, values, and personality traits—that make you who you are. Academic qualifications and technical skills will take you down the road, but heart puts you on the right road to begin with and keeps you on the road when the going gets tough.

To follow your heart, you have to know your heart. That’s a tall order to fill for an 18-year-old just graduating from high school. Most young people simply have not had enough life experiences to know with any confidence who they are and where they are headed.

As a parent, you are in an ideal position to observe and nurture your youth’s interests and inclinations. You can urge your youth to seek out interesting activities—in school and out—and encourage them to give their best shot to everything they do. You can initiate casual career conversations with your youth about their areas of interest: what they like (and do not like) about an activity and what they could do to get more exposure to the things they love.

Even youthful enthusiasms that seemingly have no relevance to the work world may hold tantalizing clues to your youth’s inner predispositions. That fashion maverick, sports extremist, or rock-star wannabe at home is demonstrating preferences that can be expressed in a variety of legitimate work roles.

### ***Focus on the Journey***

Even many adults would say that their careers in recent years have looked more like a winding road than a straight stretch of highway. Since we cannot be sure what our ultimate destination will be, we might as well get the most out of the side trips along the way.

For youth starting out, it is not so much a case of their not thinking about the future as it is that the future is fuzzy, perhaps even formidable. A challenge for parents is to resist the temptation to have their child zero in too quickly on a single occupational choice before they have had a chance to find out what is out there. Before youth can make reasonable decisions, they need to see the many possibilities, not the narrow choices. It is a case of “if you cannot see it, you cannot be it.” Youth need to learn more about different work and training options—ones they never even imagined existed. They need to have experiences so they have some way of discovering what suits them. And, most importantly, they need to see pathways: What can I do now to get to the next step? How do I get from here to there?

Parents can play a pivotal role in helping their child to manoeuvre through that stage between here and there. You can help your youth to make sense of how their various experiences connect to options in the real world and how certain themes keep cropping up in the things they are drawn to. You can guide and support the many smaller decisions your youth is making every day, because career building does not come from one big decision. It is the result of many little decisions made over time.

### ***Keep Learning***

In and out of school young people are always learning. They learn in both their school courses and extracurricular activities. They also learn through volunteer and part-time jobs, pastimes and hobbies, clubs and organizations, and sports and recreational activities, as well as other interests.

Parents can play an important role in encouraging their child to pursue any opportunity to acquire new skills, gain new knowledge, or learn something new about themselves. A lasting gift parents can give their child is feedback and credit for jobs well done, efforts made, responsibilities upheld, difficulties overcome, and lessons learned. Youths who feel they are competent to handle their immediate world are more apt to seek out new experiences that push the envelope and test new waters. Equally important is helping your youth to make sense of their learning experiences and reinforcing the connections between what they have learned and how that learning applies to different career directions.

Along the way, your youth will learn more and more about themselves and will become more confident and thereby more able to think about the big picture of their future.

## ***Access Your Allies***

Everyone needs help to build and sustain a career at some point along the way. Sometimes that help is information or advice; sometimes it is practical assistance (e.g., a loan, a job lead); and sometimes it is a sympathetic ear. As a parent, you have probably helped your youth in most (if not all) of these ways throughout their childhood. As a career coach, this role expands.

You have an established network of friends and acquaintances, or “allies”, who have their own networks of friends and acquaintances. You are in an excellent position to introduce your youth to people willing to offer reliable information or sound advice. You can also help your youth realize that they too have a network of contacts that have given, and will continue to give, valuable support. Encourage your youth to see that investing time in maintaining healthy relationships with “allies” can be one of their biggest career-building boons.

## ***Access Your Allies: Using Your Network***

If you were in the market for a new microwave or hairdresser, you would not hesitate to ask for advice from people in your circle who might know about these devices. Somehow, when it comes to career information or job leads, we are more reluctant to ask for help. It is time to give networking the respect it deserves as one of the most powerful career-building tools you and your youth will ever have.

## ***Networking Starts at Home***

A network consists of people who know you and can support what you are doing—people who are genuinely interested in your success and who are happy to give you their time, knowledge, advice, and support.

Networking is nothing more than communicating with people, and no rule says the information and advice your youth seeks has to come from career experts. Start with people who are already an important (and comfortable) part of your youth’s life.

## ***Here Are Some Examples***

### **Family**

Oddly enough, we often do not consider networking within our own families—parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins should all be considered. All have likely been in the work world for a while, probably went to school with some interesting people, and have friends who work in a range of different occupations (who also have friends).

### **School Associates**

This includes classmates, teachers, principals, guidance counsellors, work-experience co-ordinators, and sports coaches. If your youth has had a good relationship with anyone connected with school, contact does not have to end with the school year or a change in schools.

### **Friends**

We have already talked about your friends. What about your youth's friends? They all have parents who have their own networks of relatives, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances.

### **Other Trusted People**

This could be anyone—your dentist, the corner-store owner, a club leader, recreational director, niece's babysitter—you know and respect who can tap you into their own network of relatives, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances.

Do any of your contacts work in that occupation, know someone who does, or know someone who knows someone who does? You and your youth will probably not have to go beyond two or three phone calls before someone you know connects you to someone *in the know*.

## **Overcoming Your Nerves**

Making cold calls to “strangers” can be unnerving, especially for youth who are shy or insecure. As a parent, you can ease their stage fright. Work with your youth to help identify people in your or their network with whom your youth would be comfortable talking (see the Who Is in Your Network? graphic). Make some of the initial cold calls to introduce your youth and smooth the way. Help your youth to develop a script of good questions to ask, and offer to be the first interview subject so your youth gets some practice (see the Information Meetings handout).

### **Different People for Different Reasons**

Even if it is not always obvious, parents are a youth's number one choice when it comes to seeking advice on career concerns. At certain times and for certain topics, however, your youth may accept information and advice better from someone other than their parent.

When youth are researching different educational options, they may be more open to the information coming from experts or people who have gone the route (e.g., admissions personnel at post-secondary institutions, graduates, or students taking a training program).

When youth are starting to mull over tentative career ideas, you may not be their first choice of adviser. They usually want to please their parents, and so they may seek out a friend or favourite uncle to test out their budding dreams or express their fears or hopes about the future. They are looking for someone who will listen and acknowledge their ideas or concerns without judging or being disappointed. Once they feel more confident, they will include you in the plan. If “it takes a village to raise a child,” it takes a network to build and sustain a career

# Who is in Your Network?





# Information Meetings: Career Conversations with a Pro

Information meetings are a way of getting the real details on career options from someone who has first-hand knowledge. They are based on the simple idea that, for example, if you want to know what a graphic designer really does, you should talk to a graphic designer.

As a parent, you want your child to have the best information possible so that their career decisions are based on a realistic picture of what is in store for them. You cannot possibly know the ins and outs of the thousands of occupations that exist in the Canadian economy. You can, however, help your child to seek information from people in the know by learning the basics of information meetings.

## **Information meetings do not have to be formal.**

They can be as casual as talking to a neighbour at a barbecue, attending a career fair or college open house, touring an uncle's workplace, or talking to your dentist's receptionist while waiting for your appointment.

## **Information meetings can be worked into coursework.**

Some courses, such as Career Development 10 and Career Development 11, have career research as a component. Other curriculum areas, such as English language arts, business education, family studies, film and video production, and co-operative education, may offer opportunities for your child to turn career conversations into a class project.

## **There is always someone to talk to.**

Here is how it works. Your child needs information. Someone has that information. Anyone is may be helpful if they know about the occupation in which your child is interested. Look at the graphic in the Access Your Allies handout to generate a list of good contacts.

## **Practice makes perfect.**

Your child will likely be nervous about cold-calling a stranger, and so it is a good idea to start with people they know. If they can practice their interviewing techniques with you or a co-operative friend, they will gain confidence and find that it gets easier each time.

## **Example:**

*Mr. XX, I've been thinking about career options that might be a good choice for me. I am hoping to talk to people who are working in these fields, and I chose you. Would it be possible to take 15 or 20 minutes of your time to talk about how you got into your line of work and what you think about it? . . . When would be a good time for you?*

### **Keep career conversations going.**

Do not get discouraged if your youth's interests flare up and then fade, are all over the map, or seem to be totally unrealistic (e.g., rock star, NHL player). The more you support and encourage your youth's career exploration, the more they will share their dreams and aspirations with you. Find out what they learned from their career research. Have they changed their mind based on what they learned? Are they even more interested? Do they want to learn more? Over time, they (and you) will start to see patterns of interest emerging, and you can help your youth to focus (or expand) on those fields of sustained interest.

### **GOOD QUESTIONS = GOOD INFORMATION**

The meeting might happen on the spot. Help your youth to prepare good questions ahead of time so they come across as someone who is serious and interested. Your youth's questions should be tailored to what they want to learn. Here are some basic questions.

- What do you do on a typical day on the job?
- What do you enjoy most about your work? Least?
- What education or training is needed?
- What personal qualities are important to succeed in this kind of work?
- What were you like as a kid and teen (e.g., interests, academics, outside-of-school activities)? Did any of that help you to decide on your line of work?
- What career opportunities are possible for someone entering this type of work?
- How do you see this occupation changing in the future?

*Thank you for your time. I really appreciate your being willing to tell me about your work.*

### **AFTER THE MEETING**

Help your youth make sense of the information. Discuss the following:

- What do you like best about this occupation? Least?
- Can you see yourself doing this for eight hours a day, five days a week?
- Is it what you thought it was going to be like?
- What would make this occupation more attractive to you?
- Does this interview make you think about other occupations you'd like to explore?

## **MORE MEETINGS—MORE INFORMATION**

Help your youth compare what different professionals have to say about their careers by asking them

- Does everyone say the same things about this occupation? How were they different?
- Which person seems the most like you? How are you alike?
- Are you still excited about this occupation?
- Can you think of anything you can do right now that would help you to get closer to this goal?

# Volunteering Is Not Just Doing Something for Nothing

We all know that volunteering makes a positive impact on our communities. But did you know that it can have many career benefits as well?

## **Meet Interesting People**

Volunteering brings together a variety of people. It expands your youth's circle of contacts and connects them with people they might never otherwise meet. While sharing the workload for a cause they believe in, your youth is also sharing in the lives of those with whom they come in contact. People who take a personal interest in your youth are more likely to offer information, support, and connections that can be useful as they navigate their career path.

## **Enhance Resumés**

Employers are interested in having a complete picture of applicants. Your youth's volunteer life provides hands-on experience and examples of their character, commitment, and interests. Volunteering can also help your youth to build a career portfolio in the form of references, skills-training certificates, performance appraisals, awards, etc.

## **Learn New Skills**

Some organizations provide training for their volunteers in preparation for the work they will be doing. In addition to the technical skills and knowledge needed for the particular job, your youth also develops personal-management skills that are useful in all workplaces: the ability to work as part of a team, show up on schedule, handle responsibilities, solve problems, etc.

## **Expand Horizons**

Volunteering gives your youth the chance to discover what kinds of things they are good at and enjoy the most. This can help to shape their ideas about their career goals. It can also help them to understand people who are different from themselves: perhaps people with disabilities, people in financial need, sick kids, newcomers to Canada, or the elderly.

## **Feel Good**

Nothing makes a person feel more self-confident than realizing that people depend on them, knowing they made a difference, and feeling proud of what they accomplished.

Volunteering does this. It is also a great way to get perspective on one's own life. It is easy for youth to get consumed with worries about grades or negative comparisons with friends. By focusing on things bigger than themselves, young people get some distance from such things and see the opportunity to set their priorities straight.

### **CONSIDER THE WORLD OF VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

- Fundraisers, canvassers, sellers
- Public relations workers, speakers
- Graphic designers, web-page designers, computer operators
- Tutors, trainers, mentors
- Office assistants
- Personal-care assistants
- Entertainers, performers, artists
- Helpline operators
- Event organizers, participants
- Handy persons, builders, cleanup crews
- Drivers
- Sports coaches, crafts people, recreation leaders
- Kitchen helpers, food servers

### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

Your youth can check the phone book under Organizations, Social and Human Service Organizations, Arts and Cultural Organizations, or Sports Associations. They can ask friends or family for ideas and contacts and look on bulletin boards at the library.

When they are calling an organization to offer their time, it is best to ask for the volunteer co-ordinator. Most places will ask applicants to come for an interview, which is usually casual.

### **Your youth should be ready to answer some questions, such as**

- Why do you want to volunteer for our organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- How many hours a week will you be able to volunteer?
- What are your interests?
- Do you have any special skills?

**Your youth should have a few questions prepared, such as**

- What will be expected of me if I volunteer here?
- What kind of training will I receive?
- How many hours do you expect me to volunteer each week or month?

If it is a good fit—meaning the youth likes the work and the organization and the organization appreciates the service of the youth—volunteering can be a wonderful way for youth to put their energies, interests, and skills to meaningful use.

# Assets & Challenges

Everyone has assets that can help them along the career journey. But we also have challenges, and no one is perfect. Even some of the most acclaimed individuals have faced a variety of challenges. Albert Einstein, who had difficulty with social interactions, was very intelligent but had difficulty learning in school. Billy Joel has experienced mental health challenges, yet is a very successful musician. David Beckham, a superstar soccer player, suffers from OCD. Actress Whoopi Goldberg experienced significant difficulty in school and was diagnosed as dyslexic. Canadian Member of Parliament Steven Fletcher, who is paraplegic, has a successful career as a politician. Many other people have successful careers in spite of their physical, mental, health, or learning challenges.

The degree to which a challenge affects an individual varies with both the type of challenge and the individual's personality and character. While challenges may affect some training or career choices, this does not mean the individual cannot be successful in their career and life journey. The key will be to ensure that the individual's needs are identified and appropriate resources researched and put in place.

Here are a few suggestions that might be helpful:

**Post-Secondary Education or Other Training:** Both you and your child should discuss what supports are offered with staff at various post-secondary institutions or in training programs. This could include technical devices, tutoring, note takers, physical assistance, reduced course load, etc. The key is to ensure that the resources are put in place.

**Financial Support:** Research what financial assistance may be available through a variety of sources. This might include support groups, community groups, private companies offering scholarships, religious organizations, charitable clubs, government funding, etc.

**Provide Personal Support:** You have been and continue to be a source of motivation and encouragement for your child. While challenges do create twists in the career journey, your emotional support will assist them as they navigate those twists and turns.

**Entering the Workforce:** Just as supports or resources may be required in a training setting, they may also be needed in a work setting. Some individuals may benefit from consulting career programs, which provide a variety of services to person with challenges. Such services include workshops, job-coach consultancy, Nova Scotia Works offices, etc.

Parents are strongly urged to begin discussing options and supports with guidance staff and other organizations. Numerous organizations (depending on the type of challenge) provide a variety of programs and supports to help individuals make the transition to training and employment. It is a good idea to begin exploring options as soon as possible, to ensure that your youth receives the supports they may require along their career and life journey.

Remember, your youth may have a challenge or disability, but that is not who they are, nor does it define them. Understanding the impact of the challenge will assist in identifying appropriate career goals and ensuring success in the world of work.





Senior High  
Parent Guide

**Parents as  
Career Coaches**

