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Career Perspectives: Parenting and Career Choice, Elementary Guide

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Maine Occupational Information Coordinating Committee

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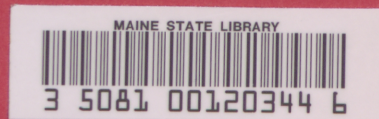
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Parenting and Career Choice
Elementary Guide



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CAREER PERSPECTIVES:

PARENTING AND CAREER CHOICE

**A Handbook for Parents to Help their Children
with Career Decisions**

Elementary Guide

Prepared by

Lucille Christy Meltz

&

Nancy Rankin Houtz

for the

Maine Occupational Information Coordinating Committee

March 1992

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"One of the essential goals of parenthood is to make children glad they were born and eager for life."*

PREFACE

This two-booklet series was written to provide you with some thoughts, ideas, and practical information about the career development process and your role as a parent.

The first booklet is geared to parents whose children are in elementary school. These are critical years - years when the foundation is laid for lifelong behavioral patterns. As such, the focus is on the relationship of self-esteem to career development, the importance of play, and a set of "life" skills that you can help your child develop. Perhaps more important than projecting what career path your child will choose is preparing him or her for adulthood with a set of skills that will help him or her to be successful no matter what work choices he or she makes. Finally, there are some ideas for activities to expand your child's awareness about the world of work.

The second booklet is written for parents whose children are in high school. Here the focus is on understanding the developmental stages of your teen and some of the issues and concerns that your teen may face. There are also many practical suggestions for helping your teen make informed choices about work and prepare for life beyond school. Preparing your child for the future is no easy task. It may be discouraging in the face of numerous cultural influences and increasing pressures on families and society. However, there are resources and technology today that can support you in your effort.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" That age old question so frequently and perhaps innocently asked of children actually provides an opportunity for them to fantasize about their place in the world as they know it. As they grow and increase their awareness of who they are and gather more information about the world of work, those fantasies are likely to become more realistic, more attainable. Helping children discover their goals in life is an important part of the parenting process. In essence, it is a way of affirming and supporting who they are. There are four basic premises which underlie the information presented:

- 1) That the career development process is a lifelong one, beginning early in life and continuing to evolve as the individual matures and changes.
- 2) That a developmental model is most useful in understanding the link between growth and career choices.
- 3) That parents play a significant role in influencing their children's aspirations and level of self-esteem.
- 4) That parents can best serve their children by encouraging the development of their children's strengths and interests, even if the path they choose isn't what the parents would choose for them.

Hopefully, this booklet series will give you some ideas about where to begin or reaffirm the commitment you've already made to your child.

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PREPARING YOUTH FOR OUR FUTURE WORLD

When you look at your child, you are looking at a face of the future. He or she will live and work in a tomorrow that holds great promise yet can be uncertain. Having a basic understanding of occupational forecasts and changing labor market trends provides you with knowledge to help you prepare your child for the future. The visions of the world of work in the years to come are striking, diverse and sometimes conflicting. However, several common trends emerge that need to be understood.

1. The service industry is growing and will continue to do so.

Varying estimates from 15 to 20 million new service jobs indicate the rapid growth of this section of the economy while the manufacturing industry declines. Areas of retail trade, wholesale trade, finance, insurance and real estate will grow the fastest, accounting for 75% of the new jobs. Other service areas that are on the increase include health, social services, legal and educational services. While occupations in mining, agriculture, forestry and fishing will all shrink, the number of retail sales workers and waiters and waitresses will make up more than half the total job growth by the year 2000. Although many employment opportunities will be low paying entry level jobs, service related occupations also include para-professional and professional level work. With an increasing elderly population, a possible teacher shortage, and more emphasis in humanizing of the workforce, there will probably be an increased demand for medical, educational and social welfare services at all levels.

2. Use of the computer is becoming commonplace in the workplace and will continue to grow.

Some forecasters believe that by the year 2000 computers and robots with advanced memory systems will create totally automated manufacturing. The predominance of computers will mean, in some views, that over 80% of the work force will be providing information to the public through operating, managing, researching, designing or teaching using computers to access information systems.

3. Technical occupations will be in more demand.

The heavy use of computers and possible increased evolution of robots will give rise to the need for more technical expertise to test and repair these error-prone machines. In addition, other technical fields will increase from energy and waste management technicians to technologists in the fields of nuclear medicine, dialysis and diagnostic brain techniques.

4. The workplace itself will change.

It is predicted that increasingly complex production systems will create new relationships between management and workers. Many forecasters believe there will be a greater need for judgement and open-ended problem solvers by all workers as delineation between management and workers decreases. Workers will more likely work in small teams and there will be more attention to the interpersonal process of people cooperating and collaborating. There may be

increased opportunity for part time work and contract and consulting work, perhaps as much as 25% of the work force. Workers will probably be more directly involved in what are usually management decisions such as planning a new plant together.

5. Educational levels of all workers are on the rise.

Occupations in which a third or more of the workers have less than a high school diploma such as agriculture, forestry and fishing are projected to decline by 5 to 10% through the year 2000. Even at non-managerial retail sales worker levels, more than one half will have some college training. Educational attainments of the work force will continue to increase while jobs for high school dropouts will be nonexistent in the foreseeable future. These predicted trends mean that preparing your child for tomorrow's work force involves providing him with special skills that as a parent you can encourage and develop at home. The following are areas of learning and development that the National Education Association recommends all parents consider as they prepare their children for the 21st century.

SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY -- PREREQUISITES FOR ADULT LIVING

A. Literacy and Language

An increasingly educated workplace means more competition. Your child will need to be able to use and understand the English language well enough to meet the demands of a more complex work setting. The skill of reading is essential for language use and is best encouraged first at home. Children who enjoy and excel at reading generally come

from homes in which parents read both for information and for leisure. Turn off the TV and read a book from as early as your child can understand the spoken word. Read to your child as a toddler and discuss books when your child is a pre-teen/teenager. Parents are the key to learning and enjoying the written word. To encourage written communication in your child, applaud earliest efforts so that writing becomes an enjoyable activity. Writing isn't just school work; you can discuss ideas with your child and encourage letter writing, keeping a journal or writing notes to you just for the fun of it.

Because America's workplace is increasingly international, the learning of a second language by all children has become a recommendation by many state education departments. You can develop an appreciation of other languages and cultures in your child by sharing your own ethnic heritage, going to ethnic restaurants, cultivating foreign acquaintances and supporting early learning of a second language in school.

B. Numeracy and Computer Literacy

With tomorrow's growing emphasis on shared problem solving approaches by workers and managers, everyone will be expected to be basically numerate (able to deal with numbers) and computer literate (able to operate a computer). In an increasingly technological society both skills will be highly valued. Educators believe that numeracy is second only to literacy in a child's learning priorities and parents can do a great deal to insure success. Encourage your child to use numbers as a part of daily life, from checking the bill at the market or a restaurant, having a personal bank account, helping calculate family expenses, buying own clothes, comparison shopping or

keeping a budget. As early as pre-teen years children can be responsible for their own money whether from allowances or small jobs.

Most children today are more technically oriented than their parents, having grown up with TV, video, VCRs and computers. The task for parents is for you to be able to help your child use a computer or other technology creatively, not as an obsessive game player of Nintendo or passively glued to video. Your child will likely master a computer's operation in school. It may be your job as a parent to discuss the information or experience it provides to help involve your child as an active rather than a passive learner.

C. Problem Solving and Critical Thinking

In the work force of the future, decision making will take place at all levels and children today need to acquire the skills to help them analyze, synthesize and solve problems. Asking your children "Why?" or "What makes you think . . .?" or "What if . . .?" about processes and natural events around them will stimulate their thoughts in creative directions. Playing mind bender games or board games that use problem solving skills can be an enjoyable family activity. Children need to develop the concept that there may be many approaches to any one problem; so you will need to help your child realize early that only one right answer is not always the best solution.

D. Cooperation/Teamwork

People who can work well with other people will be increasingly valued in our growing democratic service-oriented workplace and global economy. The family is an excellent place to develop collaborative skills. The more you can foster a child's involvement in responsibly

contributing to combined efforts at home, the more these skills will be developed. Combined decision making by your child and you in areas such as meal planning, taking trips or vacations, or a day's outing will create a spirit of teamwork. Ask your child to help develop fair rules and to consider the consequences when they are broken. The idea is working or learning productively together, a skill which may be critical to the success of future workers.

A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

The trends of tomorrow can never be guaranteed for no one knows exactly what the future will hold. The best predictions cannot take into account the host of variables involved in economic, political and social change. For this reasons, as a parent reviewing the possibilities, you will need to have a balanced view. The skills listed here, regardless of the degree of fulfillment of the various forecasts, will have value and application in preparation for all careers as they help your child develop as a more educated, aware and cooperative individual. Your best efforts for your son or daughter and future success can emerge from promoting all areas of personal development intellectual, emotional, psychological and social. The sections to follow in this guide will help you as a parent to consider and apply all of these approaches toward your child's eventual occupational choice.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION The Early Years (K-8)

As a parent of a kindergartner or even a 5th grader, you may be thinking, "career development?" Isn't my child too young to be worrying about a career? And besides, doesn't he or she have until high school to really think about that?" While it is true that children have many years to sort out information about the world of work and explore their skills and interests, the career development process begins early in life. The early years are critical, as it is during this time that the foundation is laid for future decisions and choices.

You play a significant role in your child's career development process. Career development is, after all, much more than the work choices that your child will make. It is the outward expression of all the qualities that make your child unique.

An essential element of this process is the development of self-esteem. Formed early in life, self-esteem is the total belief system which shapes an individual's perceptions and relationship to the world.² It forms the core sense of self which influences what one wants to do in life. It also influences what one believes he or she deserves in life. As adults, people with a positive self-esteem tend to believe they deserve to have a happy life.³ They are challenged by problems and respond to them creatively and assertively. Following is Jean's story which reflects how accurate self knowledge and planful decision making resulted in an excellent match of personal interests/ability and occupation:

Jean is a nurse in the maternity ward of a local hospital. She loves her work because it is challenging and gives her the opportunity to pursue her interests in childbirth education. She has always enjoyed working with people and this job allows her to interact with other nurses, doctors, patients and their families. As a child she was very outgoing and expressed an interest in helping others. She excelled in science courses at school. Her parents encouraged her interests and helped her appreciate her strengths. When she began to think about her career, they suggested that she read about professions in the health sciences and talk with the school nurse about her job.

Unlike Jean, individuals with low self-esteem are often confused about what they want to do with their lives. Their behaviors may reflect an upbringing that was overprotective, over indulgent, or abusive.⁴ Often, they approach the world with fear and a sense that they don't deserve happiness in life. Individuals suffering from low self-esteem may not pursue careers that interest them, because they may perceive that the hurdles are too great. They often settle for jobs that don't fully utilize their abilities and intelligence, because they believe they can't do any better.⁵ John is such an example:

John was always enchanted by the ocean and loved books about marine life. After high school, he went to work for a small boatyard repairing fishing boats. Now at 37, he feels unfulfilled in his work and wishes he had gone to college to pursue his interest in marine biology. Although he works near the ocean, he doesn't feel challenged and excited by what he does. As a child, he was often told that he couldn't do anything right. His parents frequently stepped in to finish things he had started, conveying the message that they didn't feel he was very competent.

HOW SELF-ESTEEM DEVELOPS

Your child's self-view and sense of self-esteem began to form early in infancy and will continue to develop throughout his or her life. Each developmental stage contributes new impressions, feelings, and eventually complex thoughts resulting in an overall sense of worth or inadequacy. During infancy, children have no sense of self as such. Rather, they "experience" and are "aware" of basic sensations. They begin to develop a sense of trust and security as their basic needs are met - hunger, pain relief, and comfort, in addition to emotional support -- love, touch, and nurturing.

When children learn to talk and experience themselves in many situations (including others' reactions), they gradually develop a sense of self. They achieve a sense of autonomy and an awareness that they are individuals, rather than an extension of their parents. The first view of self is formed during these early stages primarily from the reactions of parents and significant others - relatives and siblings. As children grow beyond early childhood and enter school, they interact with a larger range of individuals - relatives, playmates, neighbors, teachers, and schoolmates. Each of their responses and orientation to a child also influences the development of self-esteem.

HELPING YOUR CHILD DEVELOP SELF-ESTEEM THROUGH A POSITIVE SELF-VIEW

Although many elements contribute to developing high self-esteem, there are several specific areas where, through appropriate modelling and shaping of experiences, parents can convey to their children that they are valuable.

1. Autonomy and Competence

A sense of competency and autonomy is important to children. As they grow and develop, they want to know that they can learn to ride a bike, solve a math problem, or bake a cake. If they are perceived by others as being capable, they will perceive themselves in that way, thus enhancing their self-esteem. When children ask to do something that they can do, it is important to give them the opportunity even though they may not perform the activity exactly as you would. This gives them a sense of accomplishment. Take Andrew for instance:

Andrew, 7, has always been interested in how things work. When his father works on a home repair project, he provides Andrew with his own set of tools that are safe for him to use and lets him work on his own project. Thus Andrew develops a sense of competency for using certain tools and feels important because his father has provided him space in his workshop.

Children develop an "I can do it" attitude when they are allowed to learn on their own without a parent always rushing in to do it for them. Furthermore, when a child attains certain skills provide the opportunity for self directed decisions thus leading towards self-starting and autonomous (self-empowering) attitudes and behaviors.

To encourage autonomy and a sense of competency you might want to examine the following suggestions:

Suggestions for Personal Autonomy & Competency

1. Let your child make choices.

"Are you in the mood for your grey pants today,
or your red pants?"

2. Show respect for your child's struggle.

"A jar can be hard to open. Sometimes it helps
if you tap the side of the lid with a spoon."

3. Don't ask too many questions.

"Glad to see you home."

4. Don't rush in to answer questions.

"That's an interesting question. What do you
think?"

5. Encourage your child to use sources outside the home.

"Maybe the pet shop owner would have a suggestion."

6. Don't take away hope.

"So you're thinking of trying out for the play?
That should be an experience."

2. Appreciating Individual Differences

Each child is born with a unique set of strengths, abilities, and interests. By recognizing and appreciating those gifts, you can encourage them to develop and grow. When your child expresses an interest in music or woodworking, for example, it is a perfect time to provide opportunities for your child to explore that interest. This can be done through formal lessons, books, television specials, or by introducing your child to others who share a similar interest or ability. Ian's story is an example wherein his parents were able to give up their control and fears and let their son explore his interests:

Ian, 18, was 13 when he became interested in scuba diving. He had seen several specials on television where divers were needed for marine research projects. Although his parents weren't keen on the idea (because of their own fears about the dangers of deep sea diving), they encouraged him to save his money so he could take lessons at the YMCA. With 3 years of diving experience, he plans to get a summer job teaching diving at the Y.

Sometimes, parents will encourage their child to pursue a particular activity or profession based on their own values, biases, and needs, rather than on what their child really wants. They may ignore their child's inherent abilities and encourage the development of skills that they find more interesting or valued by the culture. The child could interpret this as, "I must not be OK because they don't value me for who I am." Although it may be difficult to always appreciate or identify with your child's interests and abilities, it is important to affirm them, for in doing so, you affirm your child.

3. Discipline

All human beings are imperfect, but children, by virtue of their inexperience, are more imperfect than adults.⁷ They have not had the opportunities to know how to confront some of their imperfections and make more appropriate choices. Parents, in their role as teachers, provide guidance and explain what they believe are appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. When children learn that it's not okay to make mistakes or that they will always be punished when they do, they will either eventually become very rebellious or strive to meet set expectations in whatever they do. When they are punished rather than explained the consequences of their behaviors, they are not allowed the important inner process of facing their own actions.⁸ Barbara's story illustrates this:

When Barbara was a child, she was often scolded for things that were quite natural for a child to do - spilling her milk, breaking a dish, etc. Even when she brought her report card home, she was told she could have done better. She grew up feeling that if she couldn't do something perfectly, she had better not do it. Now as an adult, she is in an unchallenging job. Her childhood programming has resulted in safe and easy career decisions. She didn't pursue some of the career options she had fantasized about, because she always felt that she wouldn't be good enough.

As a parent, it is important to make a distinction between your child and the inappropriate behaviors. If children are viewed as naughty, stupid, or less than, they will view themselves similarly. If however, parents recognize that part of growing up is making mistakes, they can help their children learn without being shamed.

The following is a useful model for expressing your feelings about your child's unacceptable behaviors:

Suggestions for Positive Parent/Child Interactions

1. Express your feelings strongly - without attacking character.

"I'm upset that my new saw was left outside to rust in the rain."

2. State your expectations.

"I expect my tools to be returned after they've been borrowed."

3. Show your child how to make amends.

"I would like you to use a little steel wool and remove the rust from my saw."

4. Give your child a choice.

"You can borrow my tools and return them, or you can give up the privilege of using them. You decide."

5. If choices do not work, take action.

Child: "Why is the tool box locked?"
Parent: "You tell me why."

6. Problem-solve.

"What can we work out so that you can use my tools when you need them, and so that I'll be able to find them when I need them?"

4. Praise

Ironically, many counselors believe that praise for recognition and accomplishment may be just as harmful as punishing children for their inappropriate actions. Personal praise suggests to children that their worthiness is dependent on others' value of their accomplishments. When children seek approval, very often they are unable to concentrate on what they are doing, thereby not enjoying the process or doing it very well. Paradoxically, the more children are praised, the more insecure or discouraged they are likely to become, because their self-worth depends on that validation. When they aren't praised, they may feel diminished or unworthy. Rather, it may be more useful to describe with appreciation what you see or feel. In this way, children are able to praise themselves.

Here is a suggested model that will help you to use less evaluative words such as good, beautiful, and fantastic, and replace them with more descriptive terms:

1. Describe what you see.

"I see a clean floor, a smooth bed, and books neatly lined up on the shelf."

2. Describe what you feel.

"It's a pleasure to walk into this room."

3. Sum up your child's praiseworthy behavior with a word.

"You sorted out your pencils, crayons, and pens and put them in separate boxes. That's what I call organization!"¹⁰

** SKILLS FOR LIFE **

Another important part of the foundation that you are helping to lay for your child is a set of "life" skills or what one educator calls "megaskills."¹¹ These skills embody the values, attitudes, and behaviors that determine success in school and later in work. They are the skills which enhance your child's sense of achievement and will provide a framework for other skills such as reading, writing, and math.

As a concerned parent, you undoubtedly want to help your child prepare for the future. Although predictions about the future world of work are frequently made and updated, it is difficult to say precisely what technical skills your child will need or what work situations will be faced. By involving your child in activities that will develop these "life" skills, you will be providing a foundation that will help your child use and adapt what he or she learns today. Lifelong learning patterns are set in the elementary years. By taking the time to foster the development of these skills, you will help your child become a lifelong learner. At the same time, you will be contributing to his or her positive sense of self. These skills are:

Confidence	Motivation
Effort	Responsibility
Initiative	Perseverance
Caring	Teamwork
Common Sense	Problem Solving 12

In this section, each of these skills will be briefly defined and include one activity that you can do with your child to foster that skill. The appropriate age group for this activity will be noted.

Confidence

Skills List:

- * feeling able to do it
- * sense of self-respect and respect for others
- * ability to approach new or unexpected situations with minimal fear

Activity: Calling for Help (ages 7-9)

This activity helps your child learn to use the phone to report emergencies. This is especially important when children are home alone. You need a telephone book, telephone, markers, and paper.

Ask your child to find in the telephone book the numbers for Fire/Rescue and Police, usually listed at the front of the book. If you don't already have one, make a list of important numbers to call in an emergency, similar to the one that follows. With your child, fill this in and put it near the phone.

Emergency: 911 or 0

Fire _____	Dad' work _____
Police _____	Mom's work _____
Friend or Neighbor _____	

Take turns explaining what to say on the phone when you report emergencies. Examples: Someone is hurt; you smell smoke or see fire.¹³

Motivation

Skills List:

- * wanting to do it
- * eagerness to learn
- * sense of discipline it takes to stay motivated
- * ability to face competition and challenge without discouragement

Activity: Just Outside (any age)

While your children are young, start to share and discover the joy and mystery of the world: a walk as it's turning dark, a stroll through light rain. Talk together about what you're sensing and feeling. Stay up together to see the moon rise and get up early one day to watch the sun rise. Use a magnifying glass to look closely at those small objects that fascinate small children. Listen to the wind and the birds. Smell the rain and the burning wood in the fireplace. Observation and use of the senses are crucial to a scientist and to a poet.¹⁴

Effort

Skills List:

- * willingness to work hard
- * going the extra mile
- * taking time and care with work or homework assignments
- * the path to achieving mastery

Activity: A Homework System (ages 10-13)

There is a better way than nagging children every day about their homework. This activity enables children to keep track - on their own - of what has to be done. You need paper to make a homework chart that can be posted on the wall. Here's what one looks like:

Days	English	Math	Science
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Each day after school, your child makes checks to represent homework assignments. To show completed homework, the check gets circled. Attach to the chart a marker or pen so that it is always handy.¹⁵

Responsibility

Skills List:

- * doing what's right
- * knowing what you have to do and gaining self-respect from it.
- * ability to do for yourself and your family

Activity: Promises! Promises! (Ages 4-9)

When asked to do a task, children often make promises. They may not fully realize what keeping these promises involves. Their intentions are sincere. They want to please. Here's a way to get children thinking about promises and consequences. Talk about what happens when people don't do the things they are responsible for. Examples: Plants that don't get watered wilt. Animals and children that don't get fed whine. Garbage that isn't taken out smells. Ask children to think about what would happen if parents decided they didn't want to shop or cook meals, if the bus driver stayed home, if the movie projectionist didn't show up for work. Should people only do tasks they like? Discuss the effects on others when tasks are not done. Is it fair?¹⁶

Initiative

Skills List:

- * moving into action
- * making things happen
- * putting ideas into action
- * maintaining energy and interest in projects

Activity: Gather and Go (ages 7-9)

Teach children how to collect and organize materials. Start a project, big or little: a puppet stage, a dog house, a party, baking cookies. Talk with children about what they will need. (Young children will need your advice.) List what you have to purchase and what is already at home. Then, with your child, collect the essentials before you start the project.¹⁷

Perseverance

Skills List:

- * completing what you start
- * following through and finishing
- * the difference between those who try and those who succeed
- * Organizing, ordering, and sequencing

Activity: Our Very Own Photo Gallery (any age)

This activity reinforces family feelings and keeps track of precious moments that are too important to lose. You need a notebook or photo album, family photos, and pen and paper for writing captions beneath the pictures. On a large tabletop, distribute pictures so that they can be talked about individually. Figure out a way to organize the photos. Attach the pictures to the album pages, along with captions (explanations) that children can write. Example: "I am in my first bathing suit." Young children can dictate these lines. Not only does it take time to do this activity, but the activity itself illustrates the passage of time.¹⁸

Caring

Skills List:

- * showing concern for others
- * listening to and learning from others
- * consideration for others

Activity: How Can I Help? (ages 9-12)

Right near where each of us lives is someone who can use the help your child can provide. It doesn't have to be a big kind of help. Do you have an elderly neighbor or relative living nearby? Suggest that your child perform an essential task for this person on a regular basis, once or twice a week. Depending on your child's age, it could include some marketing, going to the post office, answering mail, or reading the paper aloud. Of course, it helps to know and trust the person your child is helping. Start by asking your friends for names of people they know and can vouch for.¹⁹

Teamwork

Skills List:

- * working with others
- * cooperating to achieve a common purpose
- * collaborating to get a job done

Activity: Real Work, Not Make-Work (ages 4-6)

Talk with you children about jobs that need doing at home. Ask what they think they can do. It can be surprising how willing and eager they are to tackle jobs...when they're still young and not expected to enjoy working. Set attainable goals with your child. Start with easy tasks and work up to harder ones. Example: a 4-year old can bring in the paper every day and wipe the kitchen table. Turn jobs into games. Set the task for you and your child. Race each other to see who wipes the table or retrieves the newspaper faster. Chances are, your child will win. Remember: show children how to do the work - but do not re-do their work.²⁰

Common Sense

Skills List:

- * using good judgement
- * demonstrating balance and judgement in handling time and money
- * understanding cause and effect relationships

Activity: Time Your Plan (ages 7-12)

This provides practice in making a plan. Ask children both to think about what they would like to do and to predict the times they will begin each activity. Saturday is a good day to try this. Together write down the time your child thinks each activity will begin. Example: Wake up at 8:00. Get dressed by 8:30. Finish breakfast by 9:00. Play baseball at 9:15. As children begin an activity, they write down the time next to the prediction on the plan sheet. How close are the estimates to the actual times? This planning practice can be helpful to children in a couple of ways. It helps children begin to manage their time, to take more control over how they spend it. Common sense helps give children step-by-step skills for handling major school assignments with distant due dates, such as term papers in grades 7 - 10, which just can't be done (well) the night before they are due.²¹

Problem Solving

Skills List:

- * putting what you know and what you can do into action
- * knowing how to ask questions and get answers
- * ability to identify and face a problem
- * generating ideas that could be solutions
- * making reasonable decisions

Activity: Thinking and Choosing (ages 4-7)

Children can use practice making small decisions before they have to make large ones. Ask your child to pretend the following things are happening:

- * You can't find your key and no one is home
- * You get lost on your way to a friend's house
- * You are teased on your way home from school

Ask children to think of as many ways to solve these problems as they can. Don't reject any ideas even if they sound far-fetched.²²

For detailed information about these skills and a greater variety of exercises, we suggest the book **Megaskills** by Dorothy Rich.²³

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play, another important piece of the foundation, is a vital element in your child's development. Play is children's work. It is the activity through which they learn about their world and develop their motor, language, intellectual, and social skills. Play is virtually a way of life from infancy through the eighth year, but certainly (and hopefully) continues beyond. As such, it has a significant influence on the growth of your child's self-esteem. These are some of the benefits of play:

- * Playtime aids growth - it allows children to explore, imitate, test new ideas
- * Play is investigative - the child learns through trial and error
- * Play encourages deep attention - this prepares the child for the concentration that is basic to all learning
- * Play offers a child freedom of action
- * Play provides an imaginary world a child can master - this gives the child a feeling of his or her own worth
- * Play provides a base for language learning - through interaction with others, objects, and events, children develop language
- * Play provides social opportunities
- * Play is a way of learning adult roles - through imitating adult behaviors, attitudes, and languages, a child learns about the adult world.²⁴

If your child is 5-6 years of age, he or she will most likely be involved in pretend or symbolic play (for example, mud being made into pies to be eaten).²⁵ From the ages of 7 or 8 and on, your child will become more involved in games with rules that encompass both competition and teamwork.²⁶ Through this type of play, your child will learn about sharing, resolving conflicts, leadership, and tolerating different personalities. As a parent, you can greatly enhance your child's development by providing toys, household items, and an environment where it is safe for your child to play and explore. It can also be very helpful to set aside one or two hours of

quiet time each day for your child to play alone in his or her room. Encouraging active play during childhood is one of the greatest gifts you can give your child as preparation for adulthood.

EXPLORING THE WORLD OR WORK

At a very early age, children receive all kinds of messages about work. It is not unusual for a child of 3 or 4 to ask, "Mommy, why do you have to go to work?" or "Mommy, where do you work?" or "Mommy, what is work?" When a child is dropped off at day care, she may be told, "I'll see you later. I'm going to work." or even before leaving the house in the morning, "Please hurry and get dressed. Mommy doesn't want to be late for work."

Today, with both parents working in many families and more single parents supporting their families, children often sense that work is important. They may not understand what it is, but they observe that whatever it is, it occupies a large part of their parent's time, it may require that their parent wear different clothes than he or she usually wears around the house, it may take their parents away for several days or weeks at a time, and it may affect their parent's moods.

These elementary years are ripe with opportunities to introduce your child to the world of work. From children's simple questions to their more sophisticated ones, you can introduce them to specific occupations, explain your work values, talk about work and money, perhaps even let them spend part of a day with you at your place of work.

TAKING CARE OF YOU!

Let's face it. Being a parent is not an easy job. At times it can be very stressful. In order to take care of your children in a loving, nurturing way, it is important to take care of yourself. You also need to recognize your own limitations and realize that when you are tired, concerned about finances, or experiencing stress at work, you may not be as effective as you want to be. But just being aware that you are a significant influence in your child's life can help you to make better choices about how you communicate and what type of environment you want to create.

Fortunately, there are numerous resources available to parents today. There are countless books on parenting, parent education classes, and parent support groups. Your local library or school system can be helpful in providing specific information about your areas of interest and need.

If nothing else, it is helpful to know that you are not alone in your frustrations and concerns about parenting. Talking with friends and relatives often results in useful ideas and moral support. Talking with your child's teacher may also give you some insights into how you can support your child's growth and development.

Two of the greatest gifts you can give your child are the nurturance and guidance which will help him or her to develop a healthy self-esteem. By taking advantage of the numerous resources and technology that are available today, you can get the information and help you need to prepare your child for the future. What better way to launch your child into adulthood and on the road to work that is meaningful, challenging, and fulfilling?

FOOTNOTES

1. Theresa and Frank Caplan, The Early Childhood Years: The 2-to 6-Year Old (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), p.459.
2. Marsha Sinetar, Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p.21.
3. Sinetar, p. 18.
4. Sinetar, p. 18.
5. Sinetar, p. 27.
6. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk (New York: Avon Books, 1980), p. 153.
7. Pia Mellody, Facing Codependence: What It Is, Where It Comes From, How It Sabotages Our Lives (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 65.
8. Faber and Mazlish, p.93.
9. Faber and Mazlish, p. 110.
10. Faber and Mazlish, p. 186.
11. Dorothy Rich, Megaskills (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, Inc., 1988).
12. Rich, p. 4.
13. Rich, pgs. 22-23.
14. Rich, p. 35.
15. Rich, p. 55.
16. Rich, p.65.
17. Rich, p. 77.
18. Rich, p. 85.
19. Rich, p. 96.
20. Rich, p. 106.
21. Rich, p. 125.
22. Rich, p. 136.
23. Rich, see #11.
24. Caplan and Caplan, pgs. 73-78.
25. Caplan and Caplan, p. 81.
26. Caplan and Caplan, p. 81.

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