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Career Perspectives: Parenting and Career Choice, Secondary Guide

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Maine Occupational Information Coordinating Committee

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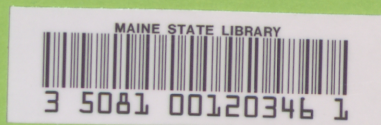
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Secondary Guide

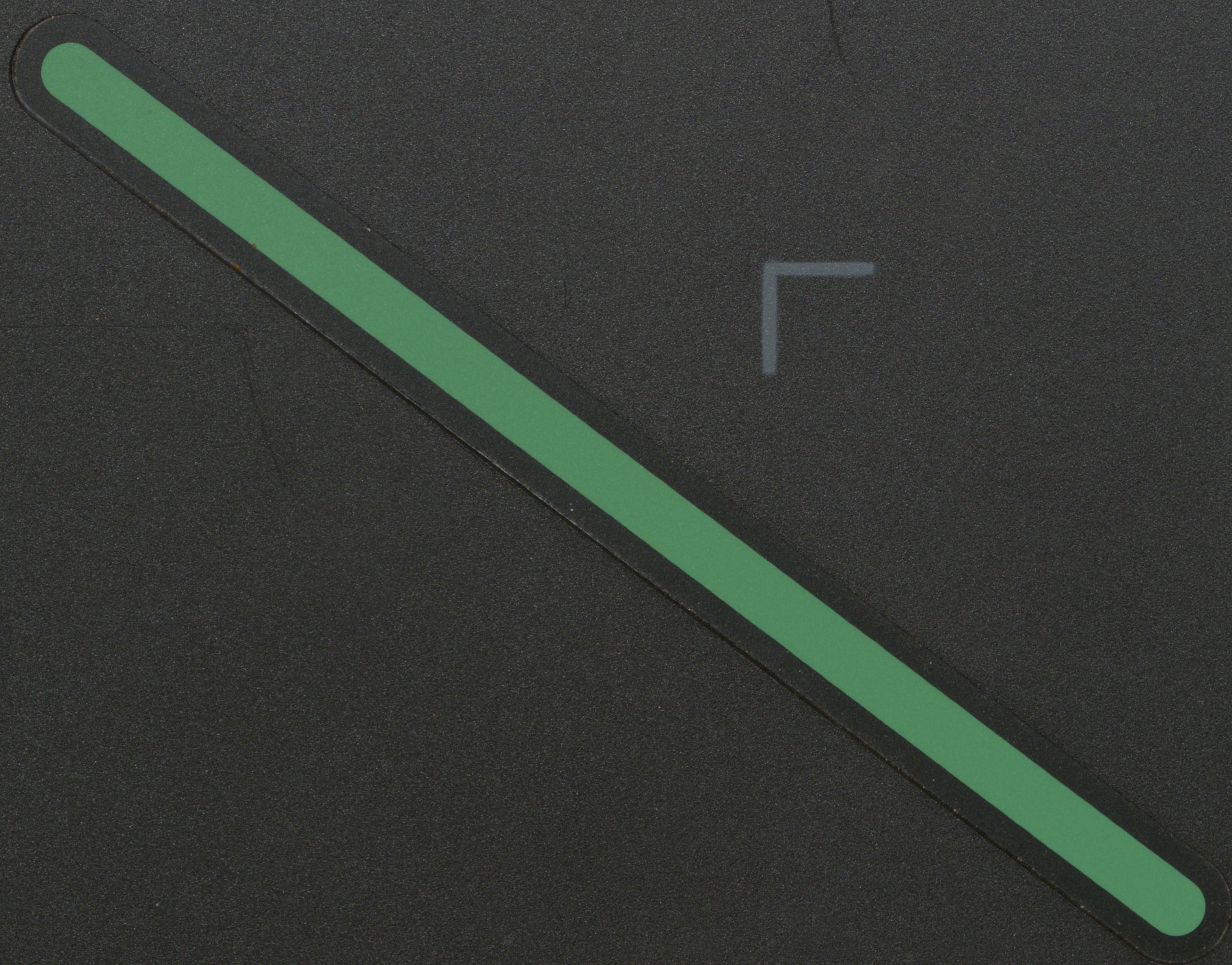


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CAREER PERSPECTIVES:

PARENTING AND CAREER CHOICE

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

Secondary Guide

Prepared by

Lucille Christy Meltz

&

Nancy Rankin Houtz

for the

Maine Occupational Information Coordinating Committee

March 1992

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CHERRY BLOSSOM

THE WHITE AND GREEN

A BLOSSOM FOR THE WHITE
AND GREEN

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THE WHITE AND GREEN

"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.

Authors:

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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.
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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.

Parents of Teens and the Career Search: A Special Challenge

If you are the parent of a young person between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, you have certainly noticed by now that the child who once catered to your opinions, aimed to please you, confided in you and sought your advice is gone or at least missing most of the time. The teenage years present a special challenge to parents who wish to help their child develop career options because they are years hallmarked by unprecedented and accelerated change at all levels both within the child and in the parent child relationship. Yet, it is more than possible to bring your teen to a level of self-understanding and awareness about careers if you first are willing to take a look at who your son or daughter is becoming. The good news is that because of your child's adolescence, this is actually the best time to act as your child's career coach.

Knowing Your Teen -- The Changes of Adolescence

"I'm too short."

"I'm too fat."

"Do you think I could get my nose fixed?"

"I can't go to the dance. I have two zits."

If any of these or similar comments sound familiar, you are not alone. You have a normal teen, a young person trying to cope with ever changing physical growth and development. Between 11 to 15 children add 25% of their adult height and 50% of their adult weight. Before the age of 18, bones harden, become more dense, and physical appearance can change drastically as one body part (like the nose or feet) grows faster proportionately than others. Sexual characteristics emerge at varying rates while fat distribution changes and complexions suffer from increased hormonal production. Teens are often

embarrassed by, and certainly preoccupied with, an emerging body over which they have no control.

The teens whose personalities, self image, attitudes and priorities are especially affected are those who mature early or late. If your daughter develops early, she may be subjected to more social and sexual pressure than her peers -- pressure she may not be ready to handle. It will be difficult for her to focus on every day realities, let alone future needs, until she learns to deal with being an unexpected center of attention. If your daughter matures late, she will probably be closer to your family longer, be more serious and involved in school or hobbies or dreams of the future. Parenting a son who matures late means you have a child whose primary focus will probably be social adjustment because of his inability to feel comparable to his peers. But if your son is an early maturer, he will most likely become a self-confident leader who, if not distracted by social popularity, can involve himself seriously in career exploration.

Maturing children need to accept, cope and adjust to the new physical bodies they are developing. This is one of the major tasks of adolescence, a necessary goal of an individual striving to become autonomous. Your child's separation from you, as a parent figure, is another healthy sign of movement into adulthood. If your daughter or son doesn't listen, won't talk to you, questions your rules, never seems to be at home, lives in his/her room, or seems permanently attached to a Walkman, fear not, your teen simply wants to find privacy, space and an inner world without adults. Your child may be annoying, frustrating and rude, but is actually in the normal

continuum of growth that began when your young child began to toddle out of your arms; it is now highly accelerated.

In the teen years, young people can't wait to grow up, try out their wings, become less dependent on mom or dad or home. They can't wait to get their driver's license, stay out all night, make their own money, own a car, or get away from home. If you find it's frightening to let go of your child, it is even more frightening to your child. Even as your teen seeks emotional and physical independence, your child is not ready for full blown separation and is often terrified by it. It is not unusual for teens all the way into their senior year (and especially during their senior year) to resist any well-meaning parental attempts to get career and college plans solidified. This does not automatically mean a lack of maturity or motivation. It probably means your daughter or son is experiencing the normal fear of leaving behind everything that represents security as your teen moves into the adult world. A little patience and understanding on your part can go a long way in helping your adolescent through this period of conflict and anxiety.

The major avenue for teens to develop autonomy is through relationships with their peers. Friends and social life become the consuming experience for the average teen and acceptance as "one of the group" the all-important goal. As a parent you may wonder what happened to your child's connection to family. In fact, peers serve the valuable function of becoming a new family with whom it is possible to safely test ideas, attitudes, behaviors and values. As your teen struggles beyond the safety of home, remember that cliques serve as a means of providing security, acceptance and support. As your teen relates to the opposite sex, he or she is also working to

put his or her masculine or feminine role into perspective. Adult friendships and romantic attachments are essential aspects of healthy, mature development and they are practiced and learned primarily in the teen years. Both the development of peer and opposite sex relationships must be experienced by teens if they are to be successful and effective in future planning.

You may find as your teen becomes more peer oriented that your child seems to think far less of your ideas, opinions and even values. A normal developmental need to test the values one grows up with, combined with growing intellect, can make your teenager argumentative, skeptical, and sometimes rebellious. In order to develop personal standards to live by, however, your child must test and question your standards first! (You can be comforted by learning that the vast majority of teens eventually adopt the values of their families and communities, even after rejecting them.) Values are the foundation of many life choices, so it is critical to allow your teen a reasonable amount of freedom to discover his/her own. As a parent you can also encourage your child's increased intellectual capacity: a developed analytical ability can be a boon to the career search.

As you experience your teen facing diverse developmental tasks of separation from family, peer acceptance, masculine or feminine identity roles and physical self-acceptance, you can better appreciate your child's struggle to meet the demands imposed by the adult world. The following vignette depicts a commonplace happening for many high school students.

Karen, a seemingly confident and capable high school junior, came in to see the guidance counselor at her mother's urging to "start thinking about after high school." In a short time the guidance counselor discovered that Karen had already given the topic considerable thought and was enthusiastic about "working with people in a medical career of some kind." The counselor asked Karen what she might do to learn more about careers in medicine, to which Karen hesitantly replied, "Oh, I supposed I could do some research, talk to people, work as a volunteer, lots of things. The counselor said, "Well, Karen, I can see you are informed about how to proceed and I'm wondering what's keeping you from doing so." Karen lowered her head and was silent. Within the next hour, with the careful probing by the counselor, Karen tearfully disclosed her preoccupation with an older boy she was seeing, her fear of an involved sexual relationship and her eroding relationship with her once stable group of friends. When Karen left the counselor's office she looked relieved. Nothing further was said about Karen's career plans. The next week, however, Karen showed up and asked the counselor to work with her on the computer for career information.

Teens often face overwhelming pressures as part of their developmental growth that distract them from the task of daily and future realities. Sometimes, as in Karen's case, career and college plans need to be put on the back burner temporarily until more pressing issues are resolved. In many cases all that is needed is a caring adult to listen and understand. As a parent you can begin to best express your faith in your teen and your hopes for the future by acknowledging what your child is experiencing today.

An Opportune Time

At 16 your child is no longer looking at you with adoring eyes but neither is your teen engaging in the fantasies of the 5-year-old about "what I want to be when I grow up." By the time children reach puberty, they are well aware that the adult working world consists of individuals in concrete occupations and they become increasingly eager to be part of that world. As a teenager surging into adulthood your child is, (whether you know about it or not,) thinking more and more

about the realities of embarking upon a career. Indeed, a teen's everyday and sometimes painful conflicts may revolve around one basic question: "Who am I?"

The need to form an identity and to become comfortable with it is the major overriding developmental goal of the teen years. This creates an opportunity for you as a parent to encourage your child's search for self. The rewards can be tremendous at this age. Your teen's confidence, self image, and even resulting peer relations can be significantly boosted by the belief that he/she has the ability, the means and the hope of "becoming somebody." Young people, for example, who discover they are good with people may begin trying new activities in school to increase their range of skills because they believe in themselves more. A young man, for example, who is encouraged to pursue his artistic talent may begin to feel less intimidated by more athletic peers, for he has established an identity for himself. If a young woman is doing poorly in English she may do a quick turn around if she realizes she's going to need decent English grades to get into the two-year college she's decided to aim for. It is common knowledge in guidance offices that the junior year is often the catchup year for college bound students. Grades can dramatically improve when students realize the reality of how close college may be. Teenagers who can have an image of who they are and believe in their future can weather the storms of adolescence more easily and take more creative risks.

Once you are able to communicate with your teen from a basis of respect for developmental issues, there are a number of specific ways in which you can be strongly influential. Studies show that it is parents, not friends or teachers, who have the most influence over a

teenager's developing career and college plans. Let's take a look at each of three areas in which you can have significant impact regarding occupational direction and choice:

- * Your Teen's Self Knowledge (Interests, Values and Abilities)
- * Your Teen's Self Concept (Self Esteem)
- * Your Teen's Understanding of The World (Career Knowledge).

Each of these are essential ingredients for positive decision making and the healthy lifelong development of success in work.

Interests, Values and Abilities

- * How well do you know your child?
- * Does your child possess a high degree of self-knowledge?
- * What is your child's personality like?
- * What does your child enjoy during leisure time?

Bob's story provides a focus for examining interests, values and abilities.

Bob, a high school sophomore, was usually unmotivated in school. He managed passing grades although his teachers and parents considered him capable of far more. He had not yet stated any interest in any future occupational or educational direction. However, Bob was outgoing and well-liked by his peers and adults in general. Ever since he was a small child he had been very socially adept. His parents observed that he always preferred being with people no matter what he was doing. It would be easy as a parent to dismiss Bob's social focus and try to encourage him to improve in school and find a subject he enjoys. The fact is that it is Bob's interest in socialization that should be the starting point for a career search. This is a valid interest area for Bob and could be developed through appropriate exploration in areas like sales, public relations, personnel work or entertainment. Doing so can validate Bob's sense of self and motivate him more in school as he comes to recognize concrete career possibilities.

Interest areas are a prime ingredient of occupational exploration. There is a positive connection between an individual's experiences with an activity and his interest in doing it regularly. If you don't like something, you probably won't want to do it. Your

teenager is no different. We know that 75% of Americans do not like their jobs. How much more fulfilling, rewarding and motivating is an activity or job that is enjoyed!

Yet many teens do not know what they like because they have not had enough opportunities or experiences. No doubt you've said to your young child, "How do you know you don't like broccoli if you haven't tried it?" As a parent of a teen you need to ask the same kind of question about broad-based life activities, athletics, clubs, community projects or events to help your child discover valid likes or dislikes. A teen, for example, who joins the French Club may not have an abiding love for the French language but may discover through running the French Club exchange program that organizing and coordinating activities is an enjoyable interest area, one that could be tied to a number of managerial occupations.

What are your teen's favorite school subjects and strongest grades? There is often a positive relationship between school subjects and careers. However, do not despair if school has been difficult for your child. Although school performance is important, long-range studies of post high school students have shown highest correlation between career success and high school involvement in extra-curricular activities. Students who were involved, sought to discover interests, both in and out of school had the best opportunity for career fulfillment.

If you find your teen resistant to trying new possibilities, consider modeling some risk-taking on your own. Teens are often reluctant "to join" because of their fear of peer rejection. However, if your son or daughter sees you getting involved in a community or school project, taking a new class, trying out new goods, visiting new

places and enjoying it, he or she may become more interested in moving out to explore possibilities as well.

Interest inventories, available through most high school guidance offices, can help both you and your child learn even more about personal interest areas. Vocational interest surveys like the Self Directed Search or the Harrington O'Shea Career Decision Making System can be administered and scored within one to two hours. They are not tests and have no failing scores. Through a series of questions, interests are identified and linked to specific occupational areas. Once reassured that these surveys are not tests, teens often enjoy finding out more about themselves and looking at new possibilities.

Interests indicate what career areas your child might like but do not guarantee success in work. Anyone looking at a career search must also consider aptitudes and abilities. Ability is a learned skill linked to interest and experience. Aptitude is innate, the ease with which a person can learn and do something.

You may already have a pretty good idea of your child's abilities because of successes or failures in certain areas. Your daughter, for example, may do well in science because she enjoys the subject, has had it since first grade and works hard at it. Her ability has developed from interest and experience. However, if your daughter never had the opportunity to work with tools or motors or machinery, she may not have any idea of her mechanical aptitude. As with interests, experience is the key to self discovery.

It is impossible to consider interests and aptitudes without looking at your child's personality and values as they are all intertwined. Certain personality characteristics are more appropriate to some career areas; they make a better "fit." If your son is

interested in clerical work, for example, he will probably be more compatible with an office environment if he tends to be efficient, careful, precise, cooperative, reliable and sociable. If he is animated, imaginative, original, reflective, expressive and versatile, however, he may be better inclined toward creative or artistic fields.

Often, teens do not even consider or know their own values or personalities or how they might relate to the daily work of an occupation.

Sharon, at 16, enjoys computer class and is successful in math. She is considering training in computer programming. At first glance, this seems an appropriate avenue to pursue. However, upon looking at the situation more carefully with her parents and counselor, Sharon discovers that what she enjoys most about computer class is her teacher and her classmates. She especially likes working as part of a unit on the math team and meeting the challenge of competition. She realizes that working independently a large part of the time, designing programs in isolation from such social contact is not what she really wants. She decides she needs to look at careers that may still use her math aptitude, but will allow her to work in conjunction with other people.

What are the work related values held by your teen? Does your child prefer to work alone or independently, free of restrictions, or feel best having a fixed structure and guideline for work? Some teens realize that although they may fantasize about "being the boss," they really don't want the responsibility involved. Is making a lot of money a high priority or is it more important to your child to be of service, help others or create items of beauty? If your teen is dead set against living in or near a city, is only comfortable with rural life, then it will be difficult for your child to consider occupations in a field like TV production or film editing since the vast majority of studios are in metropolitan areas. Career choices are often influenced by the values on holds. As a parent and mentor, you will

help your child explore values that are important, but not yet spoken. It is worth the time and effort for your teen to discover the inner and frequently unspoken values that will impact her or his career choices.

To help young people increase self knowledge in the area of aptitudes, interests, personality traits and values, there are helpful assessment instruments available in school guidance offices. Through an aptitude test like the Differential Aptitude Test, your teen may discover a never explored artistic aptitude and be willing to try a hand at pottery or photography. Through a personality type survey like the Self Directed Search your son may discover he is more realistic and conventional than he realized and would probably not enjoy having his own rock band as much as he thought. Keep in mind that in looking at any survey or test, young people tend to see things from a limited perspective. "OK, that test said I'm good in math. I guess I have to be an engineer" is a typical teen evaluation. Take the time to discuss all the possibilities generated by a test or survey and emphasize to your teen that it is only one area of exploration. It is probably best for you and your child to discuss any test or survey results with a knowledgeable professional to put the scores in a larger perspective.

SELF ESTEEM

Andy's story depicts how well-intentioned parental help can in the short run look good, but result in poor performance and low self-esteem.

Andy, a high school junior, was failing English and Math and seemed generally indifferent to any future direction. In a conference with his teachers, Andy's father disclosed that he often helped Andy with his homework. Further discussion revealed that his help was really doing Andy's work for him. Both Andy's teacher and his well-meaning father realized that since Andy didn't do the homework, he didn't understand the material and consequently failed the tests. He didn't even try because he had no confidence in his own ability.

Teens need to know that their parents believe in them, that they are worthy of their parents' trust and confidence. When Andy's dad does his homework for him, he is giving him a clear message: "You are not capable of doing this yourself." Why should Andy bother to try when he is convinced he is already a failure in his father's eyes?

Feelings of self-worth are the essence of teen identity. Low self esteem in teens is related to low motivation, poor school performance, delinquency, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, promiscuity and teen pregnancy. On the other hand, teens with high self esteem are programmed for success. Teens that like themselves are easier to live with, are more successful in school, have better choice of peers and higher aspirations.

Positive self esteem is important to everyone, but especially to adolescents. For teens to develop a coherent identity, the number one goal of adolescents, they must see themselves as capable and lovable. To work positively toward a future direction, teens must feel that they are basically OK with lots of abilities and competencies and enjoyable to be around.

As a parent, one way you can encourage your child's belief in self is to help in developing a sense of responsibility which includes allowing your child to make mistakes. You know you cannot live for your teen or take away the hurt as you did in the early years. Teenagers must prove their own competence. You can support and understand, you can't protect them, do their work for them, or turn down drugs and drinks for them. You can encourage individual and daily responsibility like having your child be in charge of personal laundry.

Encourage your teen to be in charge, allow planning and participation in realistic activities that challenge decision making ability: taking a bus into the city; taking a part-time job; planning a menu and shopping for the week's meals; making arrangements for a family trip. The rewards for believing in and challenging your child are concrete. Jobs with the most prestige are based on the most self direction. To help aim your child toward careers that society values, with creativity, self-reliance, initiative and higher pay, give your child age-appropriate responsibilities. Low self-esteem is the biggest single barrier to positive career choice. Teens with low self-esteem fear both failure and success. But when you want to be a positive source of self-esteem, it can be difficult with a sullen, withdrawn or argumentative child. However, criticism is only useful and helpful if it is constructive, specific and offered with love.

One of teenagers' biggest complaints about their parents is "They constantly nag at me." Accentuate the positive and you may find that the negative diminishes.

Praise and affirm your son or daughter at every opportunity, not just at big events:

I like the way your hair looks.
It's OK to disagree with me.
I'm glad to see you.
I'm impressed that you got your homework done early.
Thank you for helping out your sister.
I love you.

Most critical of all to self-esteem is the giving of two precious gifts to your child -- your respect and your love. Especially respect your teen's privacy, a strong need for adolescents. Solitary time is critical to thinking, figuring out a place in the world, or fantasizing about the future. Your teen's closed bedroom door is not so much a sign of rejection of you, but of your child's self absorption, a necessary ingredient in development. Your respect for your child's time alone helps develop a belief in personal self worth. That respect goes hand in hand with your love for your child. Be generous with your love as there is nothing that can replace it and there is nothing more powerful. A teenager who feels secure in a parent's love has a head start in every endeavor.

Career Knowledge

How prepared is your teen to understand the larger world of daily workdays, college expectations or adult responsibilities? In order for teens to put self-understanding to practical use, they will need concrete information about training and entry pathways to various occupations as well as an experiential taste of the world of work. If your daughter is thinking about a career as a travel agent, for example, does she realize the importance of strong organizational skills, computer literacy, a strong sense of initiative and positive

and pleasant people skills? She may be attracted by the travel benefits, but does she also appreciate the impact of frequent evening and weekend hours or will she be satisfied with the moderate income level? And finally, where and how does she train for such a career, how long will it take, what does the training consist of, and what will it cost?

As your child's career coach you will not be able to provide your teenager with information on the hundreds of possible careers to consider. But you can be aware of activities, ideas and experiences that will help your teen explore the realities of future occupations. Encourage your child to take the initiative to consider the following:

1. Job Shadowing in Small Communities

Job shadowing (observing workers performing job tasks) is essentially a normal part of life as children tag after adults or are witnesses to certain occupations because they are so readily visible. Rare is the youngster, for instance, in a Maine coastal community who does not know how lobster fishers spend their day. However, there are numerous occupations your teen may not have seen because they are not immediately close by.

Many schools run job shadowing programs as early as junior high in which young people spend a day or more actually "shadowing" an individual during a typical workday. If your child's school does not run such a program and your teen needs to find out more about being a plumber, e.g. you can ask your local plumber to assist your teen in a shadow experience. Sometimes community organizations like Lions Clubs, Jaycees, or Rotary will be helpful because members represent a wide range of occupations. Most people are flattered to be asked to

be shadowed and are eager to tell all about their career and may even suggest possible training or contacts.

An important part of shadowing is having your teen prepared to ask useful questions like "What is hard about this work?", "Why do you do it?" and not just about salary. The opportunity for you and your teen to discuss a shadowing experience can be highlighted by the answers to such questions. Of course, it is preferable if your teen can set up the shadowing experience alone, but teens, inexperienced in the world, are often overwhelmed by the idea. There is nothing wrong in smoothing the path for your teen to help get the ball rolling.

2. Volunteer Work

Volunteer work is often not considered valuable by teens or adults because it is not paid. It is, however, seen as valuable by colleges and businesses who perceive volunteer service as a mark of maturity and serious interest in a particular field.

Mary, a high school senior, was interested in social welfare as a career direction. Her grades in school were strong, but not as strong as many other students applying to a competitive social welfare program at a nearby university. Mary decided to do some volunteer work on a counseling hotline for area teens. As a volunteer she became trained in basic counseling and communication skills. She derived considerable personal satisfaction from having helped other teens. At the end of her term of service, she received an outstanding letter of recommendation from the hotline center's director which she used in her college application. Because of her volunteer work Mary was considered a promising enough applicant at the college of her choice to be accepted over students with higher academic averages.

Volunteer work, while building self confidence and skills, is a concrete, practical way to help refine career plans. As a parent, you can help make your child aware of its advantages.

3. Part-time Jobs

If kept within realistic parameters, part-time and summer jobs can help foster maturity and a sense of responsibility in your teen. Parameters such as limiting hours not to interfere with school work and achievement are critical because many teens get carried away making money for a car or stereo. As a result jobs actually become barriers to career development. It is important to keep in mind that your teen's primary job at this age is to get an education, be involved in extracurricular activities, develop an appropriate social life and increase self-understanding, i.e. your child needs to be and experience his/her age in order to develop a healthy self concept and make positive, informed choices about the future. Excessive working hours (more than 15 hours a week) do not allow teens to develop as they need to because they are distracted, worn out, or they simply don't have the time.

If teens go after jobs that are related to their interests, instead of dead end jobs where the only goal is making money, rewards can be concrete and substantial. A teen interested in carpentry who works in a lumber yard, a teen who enjoys retailing who works in a boutique, or a teen who likes cars who works in a gas station, all make career sense. In these situations these teens can network possible contacts and their positive interest in a particular job can even lead to recommendations, references or even college scholarships.

Encourage your teen to utilize self promotion when seeking a job as employers are impressed by initiative. Not every teen will take the time to learn about a business, ask informed questions, make

follow-up calls or send a thank you note after an interview. But the teen who does so has the best chance to get the desired job.

4. Summer Study and Exchange Programs

Spending part of a summer on a college campus or living with a family in France might not, on the surface, appear to be career related. However, these short term educational and cultural programs (usually three weeks to a month) can serve as great stimulating experiences for teens with a limited view of the world. Not only does one get academically challenged, but one undergoes great personal growth. Your teen will experience life in a dorm, eat in a college cafeteria and taste the independence and responsibility of college life. This short term testing of an interest area in depth and degree can influence your teen's decisions about the next steps ahead. Even if your child decides that interest area is not worth pursuing, in the long run it is easier to finance three weeks at college to discover this lack of interest than to discover the same thing in four years of college.

New interest areas like foreign language, diplomacy, public relations, international business or finance have been discovered by many teens who spend time living in a foreign country. These teens almost always return home more personally confident of themselves as well. Such residential foreign experiences are also viewed positively by colleges as indicators of maturity, initiative and responsibility.

5. Further Education

Since over 60% of occupations now require at least two years of college, planning college is no longer an expectation of a select few. Teenagers are wise to consider education or training beyond high school even if they are totally undecided about a career direction. If your teen has goals like "a good job," "meet new people," or "figure out what I want," further education is an appropriate avenue for solidifying and determining career paths while accomplishing these goals. By pursuing a liberal arts education your child will be exposed to a wide range of subjects, opportunities and experiences before having to decide on any one major area of interest at the end of the sophomore year in college. In addition, liberal arts itself can be a specific career entry way. There is an increased recruitment at liberal arts colleges from big business. The corporate world has discovered that liberal arts graduates are the strongest in thinking clearly and communicating, as well as, in creatively solving problems. Liberal arts graduates are often highly prized in administrative and managerial positions and increasingly advance the fastest in their careers.

College need not be a four year plan, however, since one or two year trade, technical and vocational schools offer outstanding training for specific occupations. Many of these schools, as part of community colleges or state vocational systems, have open admissions and cost a fraction of the tuition of four-year colleges. Lengths of programs are geared to the level of completion and entry level of the occupation. Admission requirements vary considerably but most require a minimum of satisfactory completion of high school. Others will

expect a sprinkling of courses in algebra and vocational physics. As with all post-secondary training, it is wise to have the highest level of preparation possible for admission based on your high school program of study.

Four year colleges are a much greater investment in time and energy and need to be considered with the same care as considering a career. Your son or daughter will be happiest in a college that fits best with his/her interests and abilities. If your son, for example, has always enjoyed and preferred outdoor activities, even if he is majoring in English literature, he will probably not do his best in a large inner city school unless escape to the country is convenient.

Finding the right "fit" for your teen means an investment of time for you as a parent. Visits to college campuses should begin early in a high school career during the academic year when classes are in session, and it is best if you accompany your child. Teens often have unrealistic concepts of college life and are surprised by considerations like varied class schedules, size of the student body, proximity to a town or city, dining area facilities, quality of the food, size of the dorm rooms, number of roommates or ethnic background of the students. You will need to discuss these and many other considerations with your child before a decision is made. There is no substitute for you and your teen actually seeing and experiencing a place where your child may spend the next four years.

BARRIERS TO OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE

In working with your child toward career development you will no doubt encounter some resistance along the way. This is usually due to normal teenage development and can be countered by caring listening and positive communication. However, if despite all your best efforts to encourage, affirm, inform and truly understand, your teen is continually apathetic or hostile toward the idea of post high school plans, you may need to consider other issues that thwart normal growth.

1. Drug and Alcohol Abuse

At least 10% of high school students are harmfully involved with alcohol or other drugs, another 10% are close to crossing the line to dependency. The drug of choice for teens, because of availability, is alcohol, with 1.5 million teenage problem drinkers. Alcohol and other drug addiction can be life threatening, but even when it is not, it can create havoc in the lives of teens and their families. As a parent you need to be aware of the physical, psychological and emotional symptoms of abuse. Often teachers and counselors see the effects first: lower motivation, increased passivity, lower grades or goals, changes in peer group, and changed social focus (more interest in "partying"). These negative symptoms can sometimes be interspersed with spurts of accomplishment, but the downward trend resumes and lengthens each time. If these early symptoms are not addressed, greater problems may emerge; truancy, school failure or dropout, depression, fighting, suicide attempts, or encounters with the law or police. The abuse of alcohol or other drugs maintains a delusionary process in the user. Teenagers who are chemically dependent will not

see reality clearly and may have highly unrealistic expectations about themselves and their future. Todd's story brings home the issue of drug and alcohol abuse by teenagers.

Todd was convinced he had a great future in college and could easily win an athletic scholarship as a wrestler. He was glib enough to convince his parents that he could pull up his failing grades and had periodic spurts of achievement in classes. However, his wrestling coach rarely saw him at practice and considered him an average athlete when he did attend. Todd was a teenage alcoholic.

Obviously, a teen like Todd who is harmfully involved must deal with his abuse before he can begin to consider his future; the fact is his entire future is threatened. As a parent, if you suspect any degree of alcohol or drug abuse, swift, immediate intervention on your part is critical. Seek professional help to have your daughter or son evaluated for possible addiction and take control. Your teen is in no position, if harmfully involved, to make any decisions about life.

2. Family Problems

Teens are often powerless to address the consequences of adult problems. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than within the family unit:

When Tammy showed up for her end of junior year interview with her guidance counselor, she was sullen and passive. Her grades had recently slipped in three of her classes and her teachers reported a lack of interest and preparation on her part. In discussing career exploration she said she was no longer sure what she wanted to do although until a month ago she thought she wanted to look into law enforcement. That one month period coincided with her slip in grades, her changed attitude and, not incidentally, her parents filing for divorce and the beginning of a costly custody suit for her and her younger brother.

Teens may not tell their parents about their anger, guilt, grief and fear over the split up of a family, but it is nonetheless there and will usually show up in other ways such as lowered school achievement, changed attitudes or decreased motivation. If divorce, death of a family member, alcohol or drug problems, or chronic or serious illness is impacting your family, as an adult you may also be too distraught yourself to realize the extent of your teen's pain. Too often teens feel they are "too grown up" to talk about it or are too worried about their parents to "add to their problems." However, until your child has the chance to deal with complex reactions to the family's dysfunctional state, it is unlikely that much headway will be made in terms of future planning. Family counseling is probably the most effective approach to help you and your teen deal with the difficult issues involved.

3. Limiting Beliefs

It often happens that teens and their parents decide not to look at certain kinds of occupations because they hold certain beliefs about them that may or may not be based on reality:

"Don't study art. Nobody makes any money as an artist!"

"Truck driving isn't for girls!"

"A career in medicine? We could never afford to send you to college for that!"

Before you or your teen rule out any career or training possibility because of what you think you know about it, better check it out; the facts may surprise you. Reading a book on art careers could lead to the discovery of the practical application of art talent from computer graphics to interior design with a wide range of

interested employers. Meeting and speaking with a female truck driver could yield some interesting perspectives about status, freedom and high pay of a career truck driver. (The question to ask about any job is not whether a man or woman can do it, but who has the best qualifications. Or who should have the most opportunity for higher salaries and promotions?) It could be enlightening to attend an informational meeting on financial aid and learn that higher priced colleges usually offer the best loan and scholarship programs making long-term study more accessible to qualified applicants.

Stereotypes, prejudices and rumors limit, not only your teen's future opportunities, but your communication as parent and child. If your teen has an interest in a field you have strong opinions about, you owe it to your child's healthy development to understand your opinions and prejudices related to the occupation and the facts related to the job. Your child owes you the same if he or she is closed to areas you have suggested for consideration.

4. Teen Pregnancy

In the United States one out of every ten females between the ages of fifteen and nineteen becomes pregnant. This totals 30,000 per year. Eight teenage girls become pregnant every day in Maine. According to a Ford Foundation Study, the outlook for these young mothers and the teen fathers is not good.

Teen mothers tend to have poorer medical outcomes during pregnancy and delivery, have a larger family with little family stability, and inadequate education or vocational training. Because of low educational levels, teen mothers have a high unemployment rate or become stuck in occupations with low wages and little mobility.

Most pregnant teens who keep their babies drop out of school never to return and become dependent on government services and support.

As a group, teen mothers tend to be highly overrepresented in the poverty statistics.

The future looks no brighter for teen fathers who are as much at risk emotionally, socially and economically as teen mothers. Teen parents under 17 who marry are three times as likely to divorce as young adults in their 20's. Teen fathers tend to cut short their schooling, take lower status jobs and enter the labor force years earlier than their peers.

As a parent of a teen who may or may not be sexually active, you face many ethical and moral decisions in relating to and guiding your teen during these years of high risk. The choices and discussions are never easy, especially if a pregnancy does occur. However, there is some encouraging news about preventing teen pregnancy that is possible for you to consider and utilize:

It is now believed that teens who manage to say no to inappropriate sexual activity or who are sexually responsible and do not become young parents are those who are motivated to make something of their lives. There is a very strong link between high aspirations of teens and a low rate of teen pregnancy. If you are able to help your teen enhance self-confidence and self-esteem, provide chances to develop and polish many skills and encourage goal setting, chances are possibilities for the future will be strong and the risk of teen pregnancy minimal.

HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS AND SERVICES

Your teen spends the major part of the day at school, derives social contact from peers there, learns about her/his abilities and interests through classes and activities and is exposed to a wide range of larger opportunity through teachers, counselors and special programs.

As a parent helping your teen move toward the future it makes sense for you to become informed not only about your child's school progress, but about what you can expect to be offered at the school to improve achievement and help define career and educational goals.

1. School Achievement

With each decision a student makes about the future while in high school, a door of opportunity may close. Unfortunately, many teens do not even realize they are making such decisions as they do not see long-range impact. As a parent you may need to help. If your son decides not to take algebra, he is cutting off college and most vocational schools. If your daughter decides not to do homework regularly, she is cutting off an important area of self-discipline critical to many occupations. If your teen drops a course when it starts to get difficult, your child is cutting off the opportunity to learn how to meet a challenge.

School is both a place of learning and a testing ground for development of occupational skills, interests and values. Good study habits are essential for college, but they are also part and parcel of any job that demands organizational ability. You will need to encourage your child to be disciplined about homework and to choose

realistically challenging courses. You may need to set firm limits in order for your child to accomplish this.

Studies tell us that students who have greater amounts of homework generally develop greater self-discipline. Teachers and counselors know that young people who are organized and achievement oriented almost always come from homes where those values are encouraged. Bright students in remedial classes are usually there because they are directionless and lacking in self-esteem and a positive attitude. As a parent you can help by setting aside hours and a quiet area for homework. This needs to be done early in your child's school career. Study time should be respected by all the family -- a time free of phone calls, chores or interruptions. You will need to make a statement about the importance of homework and back it up. You know best what rewards or consequences can motivate your teen, whether it's driving privileges, TV time or weekend activities. The important thing is to stick to your guidelines if your child is to believe you value the importance of her/his efforts.

In terms of achievement, to be fair to your child, you need to know your child's capabilities. Children deserve a sensible and sensitive assessment of their potential before any expectations are thrust upon them. If you feel your teen's level of competency and achievement are not consistent, do not hesitate to first have a conference with all of your child's teachers and counselors. Often during group meetings of educators, patterns emerge in a youngster's study or performance that are not evident in one class. The school has the responsibility to help you discover your child's level of ability and recommend, refer or implement appropriate testing and services in the areas of learning disabilities, emotional, behavioral

or motivational counseling. As a parent you have the legal right and the parental responsibility to initiate this process.

Sometimes teens do not excel in school because the school does not offer the area or subjects in which they excel. A teen may be an outstanding swimmer or soccer player at a school that has neither a swim team or soccer team. On the other hand, your child may be very musical or talented artistically, but the school's strongest focus is athletics. As you appreciate your child's skills you may need to encourage, reinforce and validate your teen's excellence if the school cannot or will not do so. Sometimes a training program at a community college or individual lessons are called for. You also may need to advocate for your child by urging the school to expand its options or balance its areas of emphasis. Schools serve many students, but education is a cooperative effort between school and home. Not all parents take the time to let the school know what their children need. Those who do are usually heard.

If your teen is preparing for college, it is important to remember it is not all A's that count, but the taking of challenging courses. College admissions officers are more impressed by a C+ in calculus than an 'A' in Practical Math. Challenging courses keep more doors open to future training, even if your child decides five years after high school, as many do, that now is the time to attend college.

Course selection in high school needs to be considered carefully and seriously because of these many future implications. However, teen decision making about courses is often tainted by such questionable variables as which friends are taking the same course, whether it is offered before or after lunch, or how old the teacher seems! Since schools generally ask parents to approve course

selection forms, you can use this as an opportunity to discuss course selection on more concrete and realistic terms with your child. The question should be "What or where will this course take you?" "What can it do for you?" "Which courses are required and recommended by colleges you might consider?" and "What could you possibly miss out on if you don't take this course?"

2. School As A Resource

Your child's school can combine its efforts to help your child reach his/her potential with specific information on careers and training routes. Many high school guidance offices have "occupational search" computer programs through which a student can answer questions about interests, abilities and preferences and receive a list of potentially matched occupations. It is usually possible within the same program to receive detailed information including training, qualifications and descriptions of hundreds of occupations. A similar program is used to search for potential colleges.

Making good use of the computer as an occupational resource tool is the same as utilizing the outcome of an interest survey or aptitude test results. They are only meant to offer basic information to explore further. Far too often teens go home with a printout and announce that they now have found a career or college! You may need to support your child's enthusiasm with suggestions about how to follow up on this recent "discovery", anything from job shadowing to further reading.

Most high school libraries and/or guidance offices offer extensive career information including updated occupational outlook

literature and sources for further training. If a book or series suggested at the end of this guide is not available at your child's school, you may find it at community libraries or book stores or a librarian may be able to request it through interlibrary loan. Although your child is the one who should do the research and reading, it is helpful for you to be informed. Take time to share your child's interest by reading as well.

College and career fairs are commonplace at many schools, or students are offered field trips to local and state-wide fairs. Career education classes are often offered in high schools as required or elective mini-courses. In most high schools, juniors and seniors can meet with visiting college representatives or military recruiters during the school day. Some schools will bring in guest speakers on specific occupations often subject-related. An engineer or accountant will speak in math classes, or art classes may have a visiting potter. Many schools offer cooperative learning programs in which students work part of the day and receive credit, and attend classes the rest of the day. (You will need to check a program like this carefully to see if it is indeed "a career ladder opportunity" as intended or merely filling work as a fast-food service job.) You and your teen can check with the school to ascertain what career exploration programs are offered as well as what the school's overall career development philosophy is, as both will vary considerably from school to school.

Your child's guidance counselor can be a valuable and knowledgeable source of information to you as a parent if you appreciate the workings of an average guidance office. Guidance counselors often have case loads numbering in the hundreds and varied

responsibilities from course scheduling to working with abused children. However, you can still expect courteous and professional expertise if you value the counselor's time and energy by making an appointment and preparing yourself for the conference with specific questions or concerns.

Here are a few questions that will help you make the most of a counselor's time and know how:

- * Can you explain my child's course of study?
- * What choices does my child have in the future with these courses?
- * How can my child get to see you? Is an appointment needed?
- * In what way would you work with my child to help explore careers?
- * Can you help me interpret my child's test results?
- * Based on my child's current academic record, what recommendations would you make about future opportunities?
- * Do you know of any educational or community programs or services that my child could consider that would help with post-high school plans?
- * What informational meetings do you offer to parents on careers, college application or financial aid?
- * What can I do as a parent to best encourage my child to use his/her potential?

YOUR CHILD AND THE FUTURE WORLD OF WORK

This guide has been an attempt to present to you one organizational plan for preparing your child for the future. It is hoped that as a parent of a 6 year old or a 16 year old you will keep in mind that your most important job is being a parent who can understand, appreciate, value and support your child through every stage of development. Career development as a lifelong process may begin in early childhood, but continues beyond the confines of home and parents. If you have encouraged a firm foundation of self-respect, positive self-esteem, skill building, self-knowledge and healthy exploration of the world, your child will be best prepared to meet the many challenges and changes that the future world of work may bring.

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FOOTNOTES

"World of Work" and "Parents of Teens and the Career Search"

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2. Shields, p. 30.
3. Dr. Robert C. & Nancy Kolodny, How to Survive Your Adolescent's Adolescence (Toronto: Little Brown & Co. 1982) p. 229.
4. Dr. Carol Hunter Goboy. Conference: "Challenging Young Women With Career Choices" Family Planning Assoc. Augusta, Me., May 1988.
5. Kolodny, p. 119.

