

Parents as career partners

Career development assists students to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes which help them to make informed decisions about school as post-school education, employment and training options.

As a parent or carer the part you play is very important in helping your student to make these choices. Making career choices has never been easy, but the 'world of work' is now so complex that you and your children need to do careful investigation so that their career can be properly planned.

Research shows that parent and carers have the greatest influence on their children's career choice. This doesn't deny the strong influence that peer groups, the media and people in the school environment may have. The difference is that you are probably going to be the most anxious participant in these career decisions.

The workplace your children will enter may be very different to when you started working – so don't assume that you don't need to do your research too.

There is no doubt that our world is changing rapidly and that this has an enormous impact on the way we work.

Reality: A single issue of the Weekend Australian contains more information than the average person came across in their lifetime in 17th century England.

Reality: In 2006 the world generated 161 exabytes (161 billion gigabytes) of digital information – the equivalent of 23 stacks of books that reach from the Earth to the sun or think of it as 3 million times more information than in all the books ever written – in just one year!

Reality: A student leaving school today can expect six to ten job changes and three to five different occupations during their lifetime. They may spend time unemployed, be involved in education throughout their lifetime and move away from the area or country where they were born and will be involved in jobs/careers that do not yet exist.

Some strategies to help your teenagers with their career choices:

Remain Positive:	No matter how complex and confusing the changes in employment and training may seem the majority of school leavers now have access to a number of vocational pathway opportunities. Try to avoid the “What are you going to do / be when you leave school?” type questions. These questions are often very confronting. Instead take the opportunity to talk about career options whenever possible, for example when a news item appears on a current affairs program or when a university / TAFE Open Day is approaching.
Encourage them to develop a positive self-esteem:	Focus on their achievements – but not just at school. Acknowledge their efforts in all their activities – keeping their room tidy, participating in sport, community activities, setting goals and achieving them. Show them you believe in them.
Allow for a change in direction:	It is very unusual for a student to choose a career at a very early age and never waiver in their choice. Be prepared for changes in direction and encourage your teenager to continue to explore a variety of options.
Encourage them to learn from their mistakes:	Even if you feel uncertain about their choice, remain positive as they make their first steps towards their career. It isn’t the end of the world if they choose the wrong work experience or subject. Discovering that a previous career interest is not for them is a positive step in the decision making process as it give them the time to re-assess their interests and to broaden their options.
Encourage them to find an industry contact:	When a teenager begins to express an interest in a particular career if it is possible, help them to establish links with someone in that field. This person can then provide a direct, first hand information link with that particular occupation or industry.
Networking:	Students should be actively encouraged to develop an information network themselves. This network could well be friends, neighbours, part-time work employers, work experience employers and your family’s building / car repairer / plumber / accountant, etc (depending on their career interests) and other contacts etc. made by the student. The network serves two purposes – it allows students to gain realistic insights into their chosen career and it broadens their chances of finding jobs as a large number of vacancies are only advertised by word-of-mouth.
Share your experiences:	Talk to your teenagers about your own experiences of work and study and your reasons for making particular career decisions. Discuss the problems you have faced and how you dealt with them. Speak openly of the positive and negative aspects of the jobs you have done
Respect their feelings and their privacy:	Do they have someone special, perhaps not always you, to confide in? A relative, family or professional friend or someone who is interested in young people like a church or sports group leader can provide a sympathetic ear. Each student is special and needs someone to listen in a special way. No matter how strongly you may feel about what your teenagers are doing, there may be times when you need to be able to step back from the situation.

1. **Fact:** Career choice is one of life's most important decisions
2. **Fact:** Choosing a career that matches your child's interests, skills and values significantly increases their chances of success and happiness.
3. **Fact:** Free resources are readily available on the internet to help students make informed choices.
4. **Fact:** Most parents and students DO NOT use these resources.