

How to Talk to Your Teenager About Career Choices

Consider the following tips to get the conversation going ...

▶ **Be open. Try not to impose your interests or desires on your teenager.**

Remember what it was like for you at their age. You likely wanted to make your own decisions and come to your own conclusions. Now *they* are trying to form their own identity and understand their strengths, values, and interests. Encourage them to explore options and try to let them decide their own direction. Ask questions like “*What do you think about...*” rather than “*You should...*”

▶ **Be aware that you and your teenager may be very different from one another.**

You are likely different from your parents in terms of your own unique personality, abilities, and interests. Most people that report success and happiness in their careers work in an environment that “fits” them.

▶ **Help your student think about their interests, skills, and personalities. Explore with them.**

Reflect with your teenager on their past academic successes and interests. What were their favorite subjects in high school? What was their least favorite? What occupies their free time? Can they list their hobbies and passions?

Help your teenager envision their future work day! The answers to questions such as these may help eliminate careers and majors that don't fit well with your teenager's current desires or expectations.

- What hours do you see yourself working, long hours, shifts, or 8-5?
- Would you like to work outside or inside?
- Would you rather work alone, with people, or be self-employed?
- Would you be okay with wearing a uniform to work? How about dressing professionally each day?
- What salary do you anticipate earning each year?

▶ **Suggest your student talk to a career counselor at Kent State's Career Services Center.**

These are experienced helpers with access to a variety of resources that can help your teenager make informed career decisions. There are many career exploration resources and assessment tools available to help your student uncover more about themselves, their attributes and interests, and what careers may match them.

“If you listen, they will talk. If you lecture, they will walk”.

Richard T. Lapan

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► Tell them what you do at work, or have them spend a day with you on the job.

Does your teenager know what you do at work every day? Do they know what skills and abilities are needed to do your job? Share with them ... they may be quite surprised that you have those skills and can do the things you do.

Take them to work and allow them to meet colleagues in positions of interest to your teenager.

► Talk to your teenager about the career decisions and changes you have made, and why.

Your teenager may not even be aware of all the jobs you have held and experiences you have had in your career. Share with them your joys and frustrations, and even earnings, if comfortable. Help them understand what it took to get to where you are at this point in your life. This may be an enlightening experience for both of you!

► Encourage informational interviewing with other professionals.

Seek out opportunities for your teenager to observe and talk to others about their careers and jobs. Contact the Career Services Center, or visit their website, for interviewing guidelines and suggestions.

► Volunteering, interning, and part-time employment is a good way to investigate jobs and interests.

Not only will these experiences provide first-hand insight into a certain job or career, they can bolster the resume, be a good networking tool, and demonstrate initiative to prospective employers.

► Encourage them to start EARLY to explore careers, acquire experiences, and visit KSU Career Services.

New freshmen should not limit themselves to only the “familiar” careers. Remember, the decision regarding a career will influence your teenager’s choice of major and related experiences. Use the internet and other resources such as the Kent State’s Career Services Center to support their career and major decision making.

Tips for Talking to your Teenagers

1. **Pay attention to the environment.** Carefully choose the right setting and the right time for a conversation.
2. **Pay attention to yourself.** What is your body language saying? Are you really telling your teenagers you want to talk with them?
3. **Use communication encouragers.** Smiles and head nods are good encouragers; it’s the little things that encourage your teenagers to keep talking.
4. **Restate what you have heard.** Every so often, put into words what you think your teenagers are trying to communicate. Listening is hard work; make sure you understand what your children are trying to say.
5. **Use open-ended questions.** Some questions can shut down a conversation; open-ended questions encourage mutual problem solving and collaboration.
6. **Use reflections of feeling and content.** Be an empathic listener, and hear your teenager’s perspectives and their feelings.
7. **Make helpful interpretations.** Don’t try to be a know-it-all, but look for important patterns and themes in what your children are saying.
8. **Appropriately disclose personal information.** Recounting both the good events and the difficult things you have faced in your life can help your teenagers better see their path and their challenges.