



navigating the career maze

Give your teenagers hope in the future and faith in their abilities, and the groundwork for making decisions about their career is done. Career consultant **Heather Carpenter** explains why.

One of the biggest challenges faced by young people as they grow through their teenage years is deciding which career dream to follow.

This is a huge undertaking for teenagers who may have little, if any, idea of what they like, what they might be good at in the future and how to go about finding that out. As job choices expand dramatically in the 21st Century, so does the confusion. Many young people – and their parents – are overwhelmed by the information and options available to them. It is like a supermarket of choices. But how will they know which ones will suit them?

As parents, your job it is to help them join the dots between themselves and the possibilities. Their strengths and their interests should match their choices. We all do best when we follow our strengths. We can help our teenagers by letting them know what they are showing strength in and giving them the feedback they desperately need. Despite which

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jobs look secure, pay well, and have high status, the governing factor for career choice is what interests and excites your teen, and what connects with their talents and abilities. It is real interest, real attraction and real connection that provide the energy for achievement, and the motivation for learning.

It's not your job to make choices for them – if they aren't interested it is unlikely they will achieve. Making the right career choice, in the right area, at the start kicks off a success cycle, which leads to enjoyable training and a fulfilling job. Poor choices lead to failure, a lack of confidence, and dropping out. You are the best person to help your kids get it right.

Talk the talk

Supportive comments such as “you will find it, you will get there, we will work it out” demonstrate your faith in your child's ability to get there in the end. It's a very big decision with very big consequences and deserves your time and effort. You must be a patient sounding-board. Research clearly shows young people want to talk to the people they trust. But are they changing their minds all the time? Don't worry – they try on ideas like they try on clothes. Don't get frustrated or irritable with them – listen, talk it through, find out more about the jobs they are talking about and take them to see a workplace if possible. Help them find enough real information to make a decision. They quickly know if it

is what they really want or not. Then you may have to do the same thing all over again.

Give them feedback

Teenagers need to feel useful, competent and valued. These feelings build their self and work-confidence. They develop these best when their real abilities and efforts are noticed, recognised and affirmed with genuine feedback – especially from their parents. Exercises such as drawing a family tree of the jobs in the wider family, and the skills involved in each, then discussing the strengths of family members starts an interesting conversation about the skills that run in your family. It also provides an opportunity to talk about the skills you have noticed in them.

Be positive and optimistic

Above all encourage them to be optimistic – optimistic and hopeful children do better. These are also important attributes for lifelong career-confidence and resilience. They help develop the capacity to take chances, to persevere, and to recover from a setback at any stage of life. Optimistic beliefs have a positive effect on children's goals, their motivation and their ability to cope. Optimistic, hopeful children look to their future with eager anticipation. In some ways the greatest gift a parent can give is hope in the future and faith in their child's ability to have a happy life. Watch your own responses and examine them for negativity or cynicism, because when you dent your children's hopes, you diminish a precious and valuable commodity. It is crucial that young people feel hopeful about themselves and their futures to maintain the motivation to achieve their goals. Your worry is contagious – children pick it up and feel less sure about themselves. Despite crunching economic times, do not be a source of despair and worry. World events and economic conditions can change rapidly.

Don't compare careers or career choices

Take the time to look at your own beliefs about what are good and not-so-good careers. Why do you feel one career or subject choice is better than another? It's probably because it looks like it has more status and income, or it seems more useful or secure. Again, market conditions can change in an instant. In the long term your child is better off becoming extremely good at something he is vitally interested in – that is her best security.

Be aware there are huge differences in individual pathways. Don't compare! All your children may be different. Some stumble in the beginning and seem to take ages to get started; others make stunning beginnings but may falter a little further down the track. Whatever their progress through the career maze, you will worry less if you have taken steps not just to build your child's confidence but to build their sense of self and self-belief. You will watch your children make more accurate career choices, develop more resilience to cope with setbacks and more confidence to gain the future they want.

Dr Heather Carpenter is a mother of four and career consultant, counsellor and educator with extensive experience helping young people with their career decisions. She's the author of *The Career Maze, Guiding your children towards a successful future*.

top tips

Allow your children their own dreams and aspirations – they will achieve and succeed better with these.

Put in the time to help them research options – they have many more to check out than you did.

Let them know their strengths and talents – it helps them understand their capabilities and make better choices.

Learn how to have good career conversations – they do want to talk to you.

Making the right career choice in the right area at the start kicks off a success cycle, which leads to enjoyable training and a fulfilling job.

hot tips

giveaway

We have three copies of *The Career Maze, Guiding your children towards a successful future* to give away. To be in to win, write your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to The Career Maze, Parenting Magazine, PO Box 37 708, Parnell, Auckland. Entries close August 30.

