

# Positive Ways You Can Affect Your Children's Career

## Get the Most Education Possible

"What is the single most important way parents can contribute to their daughters' and sons' long-term careers? By providing them with good education and training - because the better their education and training, the better their employment prospects; and the better their jobs, the better the income. That's the way the social system works." These are the words of Professor Luther Otto in his award winning book, *Helping Your Child Choose a Career* (1996, JIST Works). He is a well known and respected expert on youth and careers.

Following this strategy, you will want to do everything you can to support and encourage your children's success in school. This will include taking the time to listen and help, to encourage, to hold reasonably high expectations, to work with teachers, and to set aside funds for further education.

Encourage your child to take the highest level math, science, and technology courses they are able to master -- so that the doors to higher level educational programs are not closed to them later on.

Does your child's school place students in "career pathways"? Or, "career clusters" or "career fields"? The schools in most states now do this. **This is a critical decision.** It will have a major impact on your child's future -- his or her success and satisfaction in school and future career. Questions to keep in mind:

- Which pathways match my child's interests?
- Does the school use a valid career interest test? [An invalid measure can mislead and be harmful](#). Unfortunately, many school officials are misinformed.

To learn about career clusters and pathways, read "[Choose a Career Cluster or Career Pathway](#)". Soon we will offer a comprehensive "ebook" on this topic at our [eBookStore](#) that you can download as a PDF to your computer. It gives the pathways for hundreds of occupations based on career interests. If you would like us to email you when it is ready, [click here](#).

All of these will involve some personal sacrifice and parent-child conflicts, but as parents it is our responsibility. And speaking from experience, the satisfaction of seeing your children get off to a good start is a wonderful feeling.

## Strengthen Their Self-Understanding

To the extent that persons have a clear idea of who they are - their interests, abilities, work values, and personality characteristics -- the more likely they are to choose an occupation that fits them. What can you do as a parent to nurture this self-understanding?

Being a good parent is the foundation. And, fortunately, there are excellent books and parent education classes available that can help you. In addition, there are numerous resources on the Internet you will find searching under "parent education." A good example is the National Parent Information Network (<http://npin.org/>) where I excerpted [Suggestions For Improving Communication With Children](#). Following these suggestions will do much to further your child's self-understanding.

Encourage your child to try out the activities described in the section [Learning More about Yourself](#). These include such things as taking an interest inventory like the Career Key, or examining how they use their leisure time for what it reveals about their interests, abilities, and values.

Have them try out and explore a variety of activities, so that they can get a clearer idea of what interests them and what they are good at, as well as what they do not like. These activities might include learning a music instrument, joining a youth club like 4-H, taking a new kind of course, or trying a new hobby or sport. They may need your encouragement and support as they try out the unfamiliar.

## Develop Their Knowledge about Work

Young people's knowledge of work is often quite limited, not only about the different jobs that exist but also how their studies at school relate to work. You can help in a number of ways. Taking the Career Key is one step. Different jobs will be identified for exploration in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH). For each job, the OOH gives valuable information about what is done in a particular occupation, the training required, how much is earned, and so on.

Other steps are suggested in the section [Learn More about the Jobs that Interest Me](#). Such things as information interviewing, job shadowing, and doing volunteer work are suggested. As a guide, tutor, supporter, and empathic listener you can help your child understand work today and how it is related to their school work.

## Teach Them Decision Making Skills

When your child or your family is making an important decision, this is an excellent opportunity to teach effective decision making. Learning these skills is essential to making any decisions, including those of career choice.

Thanks to the research of behavioral scientists, particularly Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, we know how effective decisions are made. The key is to focus on the procedures, or steps that are followed. They identify seven, and I have condensed these to four that have the acronym ACIP:

**A** is for Alternatives (you want to consider a wide range of them),

**C** is for Consequences of choosing the different alternatives,

**I** stands for the Information you gather, and

**P** is for the plans you make for implementing your decision.

These procedures are discussed in another section of this website called [High-Quality Decisions](#). Use them yourself and teach them to your children.

## Value Gender Equity and Cultural Diversity

In a democratic society, there should be equality in access to education, training, and occupations. There should be equal pay for those in the same occupation. Many women and racial minorities, however, do not have this equality in access and pay. As parents, we must guard against perpetuating sexism and racism in our children. More than that, we must be for equality, and truly value diversity.

Success in the workplace requires an enlightened attitude among workers. In 1991 a prestigious, national commission of employers identified "Works with Diversity" as being an essential skill for the U.S. to succeed as a high-performance workplace in the 21st century. Specifically, working adults need skills to:

1. "Work well with people having different ethnic, social, or educational backgrounds.
  2. Understand the concerns of members of other ethnic and gender groups.
  3. Base impressions on an individual's behavior not on stereotypes. Understand one's own culture and those of others and how they differ.
  4. Respect the rights of others while helping them make cultural adjustments where necessary."
- from: [Job Skills for the 21st Century A Guide for Students](#) (1996, Oryx Press) by Lawrence K. Jones.

It is important for parents to teach these skills to their children.

## Become Aware of Career Resources

In helping your child, you want to become familiar with the different resources you and they can draw upon. At this website you have several options: [Learn More about the Jobs that Interest Me](#), [Career Counseling](#), and [Get Help on the Internet](#). In addition, high schools, vocational schools,

community colleges, colleges, U.S. employment service offices, and vocational rehabilitation services have career centers and counselors available for help.

## Help Them Become Skill-Oriented

In today's competitive, global marketplace job skills are what count. Work is basically an economic exchange: labor for pay. We are hired to perform skills. Having marketable, transferable skills is the key to success in the workplace.

Parents can help their children:

Learn what skills are, particularly those that are *marketable*, *transferable*, and *motivated*;

How skills are used at work and why they are so important;

Learn new skills, particularly the [Foundation Skills](#), the skills required of all workers in the high-performance workplace of the 21st Century";

Identify the skills they already have; and

Develop a job skills portfolio.

These ideas are discussed in [Job Skills for the 21st Century, A Guide for Students](#).

## Observe the Effects of Part Time Work

A recent study of teenagers found that those who work more hours per week earn lower grades, spend less time on homework, exert less effort in school, are less involved in extracurricular activities, and report higher rates of drug and alcohol use and delinquency.

The students who worked did not have any advantages, compared to those who did not work, with respect to self-reliance, work orientation, or self-esteem. Other studies have found similar results.

You need to protect your children from these effects, such as limiting their work to fewer than 10 hours per week. If they work, keep an eye on how it affects their school work and social development.

Ask yourself, who are they associating with at the workplace? Are their co-workers or supervisors good role models? Are they people who will have a positive effect on your child's growth and development?

What values does this work teach? Does it promote short-term gains -- like buying the latest CD -- an empty, materialist life style at the expense of your child's education and long term development as a quality person -- someone who will do well in his or her future work?