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A Guide for Parents:

Steering your teenager toward a job and career

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Making dreams a reality

Just imagine – your son or daughter decide they want to be a ... chef, sports scientist, geologist, hairdresser, film producer, racing engineer, or perhaps even enter local government or politics. Whatever, imagine they just **know**, with that unrelenting sense of fervour only the young can feel, that's the thing they really, really want to do.

Regardless of the practicalities, they feel their true destiny calling.

After school or college, they come in bearing fistfuls of literature to read, references to delve into and online links to chase through. "I've just had a great session with our careers advisor," they call over their shoulder, as they power up a laptop, desperate to research routes into **their** career.

"Look, here's a couple of great employers I've found," they shriek in delight. "I'm going to try and contact them to see what training schemes and jobs they might have." Wow, this is just great, you think.

What the ... reality bursts in with a sickening lurch and your delightful daydream ends, starkly illuminated by the true scale of your challenge. How do you navigate a shrugging, grunting and supposedly disinterested teenager into thinking about work and a career when you can't even stop them kicking crusts under the fridge?

That dream may be a reality for some, but even if they do engage – "I want to be an astronaut. Or a brain surgeon. Yeah, that'd be good," how are you expected to know anything about routes into those careers?

There is good news.

- ✓ Young people most successfully find their way to a job or career when they, their school or college and their parents all work in partnership. This guide is about nurturing that partnership.
- ✓ If you use this guide to steer your teenager into making and acting upon their own positive choices, they'll engage with their careers service because they actually see the point in doing so.
- ✓ Once motivated, if you support them in building employability skills, applying to employers and preparing for interviews, their own enthusiasm will carry them into the start of a thrilling career.



"I want to be an astronaut. Or a brain surgeon. Yeah, that'd be good."



Work in partnership

Foster engagement

Guide their enthusiasm



Step 1 – Getting beyond the barriers

There are a huge number of career directions open to young people starting out – over 12,000, according to one source. There are truly life-impacting choices about the best entry routes to take. Young people are asked, or even told, to make a decision based on limited information and very possibly zero experience of what they'll be getting into.

Is it any wonder that fear, avoidance and even rebellion are common?

Two things to help you help your teenager find direction

- 1) With a free choice, what would they actually *want* to do? Ask:
 - ✓ What do you care about?
 - ✓ What do you like doing with your time?
 - ✓ What type of person are you?

Other questions arise, but the answers lay the foundation of both career direction and job type. As an example for parents horrified at the time their teenager spends online, or if they're gamers, or they love sit-coms, soaps or stalk-and-slash movies, the UK leads the world in all of them.

The career choices that open up from that core interest could be: scriptwriter, graphic designer, fashion designer, actor, sound engineer, set producer, event manager, accountant, project manager, IT engineer, legal professional, marketer, PR manager, recruiter, international sales person, HR administrator, and so on.

Following a career based on a real underlying interest, passion or obsession even, makes most people an unstoppable force at some point. Plus, there is no lack jobs or opportunity to be found in 'fun' industries.

- 2) Take a systematic approach to throw up alternative careers.

Online profiling tests can throw up industries, career options and job-types based on a mix of interests and personality type.

- **The Morrisby Test** is thorough and respected, but costs.
- **The National Careers Service [website](#)** has a wealth of information on what work is involved in a variety of jobs.

“How do I know what I want to do?”

“But what have I got to offer anyone?”

“You look at it, if it's so interesting.”

“I dunno, whatever?”

“Bored now.”





The National Careers Week View

From Founder, Nick Newman

Having worked for over twenty years linking students to employment opportunities in the UK, I've built up a very good picture of the employability skills that employers are looking for in young people and the aspirations students have when it comes to the world of work.

My key advice for parents is – help your children understand the relationship between skills they can develop and the employment opportunities that will be in demand when they leave education. Don't focus on specific historic job roles that may only have a limited future.

The challenges for us all

- Many of the jobs our Year 9s will be doing when they enter employment haven't even been invented yet.
- Things change so quickly; schools and colleges struggle to provide up to date information on certain career choices.
- Employers often don't get their careers message across to young people about the qualities they want in prospective candidates.
- Parents can be hampered because even the word 'career' means something completely different to different generations.

So, how can we advise young people about specific jobs when the job market itself is changing at such a rapid pace in many career-fields?

Think about skills

When I speak to students in school, I stress that they should focus more on skills, and less on specific jobs, to increase their employability when they leave education, whatever the field of work they end up choosing.

You can help by trying to get your young person to think about the new or growing technologies, fields and industries they might be interested in. Encourage them to develop core skills that will help them to stay employable in the longer term.

This next section of the guide shows how to find basic information to help your teenager identify whether a particular job offers them a future that would suit them so that they can better engage with their careers service.



"I Look at future jobs, not past ones, when advising teenagers."



When they were young, our older relatives may have been advised to train as comptometer operators.

Technology moved on and there are zero jobs in that field today.



Step 2 – Get basic-level information

Once your teenager has a job or career direction in mind, your next step is to help them get an insight into the work they would be doing. If they really can see themselves in that field, confidence and enthusiasm will build and they'll know the right questions to ask of their careers services.

Help them find out what's actually involved in job

It will help them to get an insight if they ask questions like:

- What does the work involve?
- What's a typical day, week or month like?
- How does the work change over time?
- What are the prospects for training and development?
- What are the different routes into the profession?

Guide them to the information

Ideally, they need to ask those questions and find information for themselves, but it's likely you'll need to at least start them off.

- ✓ Talk to friends and contacts, or use social media. Try to get in touch with someone who works in that job or industry. Ask if they'll answer a few questions – most people will do so gladly.
- ✓ Preferably make the introduction and get your teenager to talk to them. If that's a problem, you can do it and pass on a summary.
- ✓ Browse online links that relate to their choice and pass across the ones that are clear and provide good overview information.
- ✓ Cut and paste key summary information into a one or two page summary document, to act as a focus and reminder for them.
- ✓ Use a light touch. Advice is best received and has lasting impact when it's asked for. Work hard at not imposing your views.

Can they see themselves in that job or career?

Once your teenager has a view of what the job involves, their enthusiasm will either develop or die. If they're following a direction they feel strongly about, use their motivation to get them engaged with the careers service.

If it's not for them, go back to step one and help find a stronger interest.

"Find out what you like doing best and then get someone to pay you for doing it."

Katherine Whitehorn,
Journalist & writer



"Get in touch with someone who works in that job or industry. Most will gladly answer questions."



Step 3 – Seek professional advice

Now that your teenager has hardened up on possible job or career choices, it's time to make sure they get more detailed information.

Make a careers guidance review appointment at school

This should be an individual meeting between the school's careers advisor and your teenager. It will be more valuable if they go in knowing what job or career they are interested in and have some questions to ask.

- What job options are there, within their career choice? For example, within nursing there are several specialisations.
- What further education or training options are open for them?
- Who are typical employers and at what stage should they apply?
- Meanwhile, what's the best way to improve their employability?
- Is there help available to prepare for applications and interviews?

They should be able to come out with, or subsequently receive, hard information on their job or career choice that's detailed and up to date.

Help them to prepare beforehand

It helps if they're ready for an open discussion, and can talk about their:

- ✓ aptitudes, e.g. do they communicate well, have team-skills, etc.?
- ✓ personal qualities, e.g. are they outgoing, well-organised, etc.?
- ✓ likes and dislikes, in terms of activities, subjects, interests, etc.
- ✓ ideas and plans for the longer-term future of their lives;
- ✓ personal barriers, such as health, fitness, etc.

Jointly pull together an action plan

This should outline the key milestones, timescales and actions that they should now take. It might include things like: exam study; registering for courses; contacting employers; reviewing employability skills; getting work experience; sending applications and preparing for interviews.

Plans don't need to be overly detailed or rigid. Even a loose plan shows them that their choice is realistic and is therefore achievable.



“Meeting their careers advisor will be more valuable if they have some questions to ask.”





John Lewis Partnership
John Lewis | Waitrose

An Employer's View

From Stephen Chambers, Resourcing Delivery Manager

We're a major retail organisation with a much wider range of career opportunities than just the customer service roles you commonly see. That gives our partners the ability to take ownership of their future career.

Being near the end of a period of education and not sure what to do next can be a tough time for any young person. We've all been there. They'll feel the pressure of being a young adult and think they ought to have some idea of a career path to take, but can't imagine what they might do for the next 40 years. However, a few things will ring true for them. You know they'll want a fulfilling role, which can play a part in shaping their future career, with a company whose values match their own.

At The Application Stage ...

Even with limited work experience to date, all young people have to do to showcase their qualities is show us they've got the drive to succeed and we'll aim to get them on the right path to an exciting future. They should:

- ✓ understand a role they're applying for and research our business;
- ✓ know what **they** would expect from a great customer experience;
- ✓ ensure their CV / application captures their appealing qualities;
- ✓ give online tests their full attention and concentration.

At The Interview Stage ...

Interviews can include a group assessment, daunting for some, but the best advice for young people is to smile, enjoy the day and remember that we want them to succeed. They should be themselves, we look for authenticity and originality. To show they're enthusiastic, they can:

- ✓ make an active contribution during the assessment;
- ✓ be able to give evidence of their strengths and weaknesses;
- ✓ listen well to questions asked and use the STAR technique;
- ✓ not worry if one question goes badly, focus on the next one;
- ✓ get to know the people they could potentially be working with.

Retail is exciting and fast-moving. The work builds both confidence and experience and it can make a great start for a life-long career path.

"In retail, career opportunities can be wider than the shop-floor."

- Customer service**
- Administration**
- Merchandising**
- Human resources**
- Marketing**
- Accounting**
- Legal services**
- Distribution**
- Stock control**
- IT management**
- Store design**

"Smile and be enthusiastic. Remember, we want you to succeed."





Step 4 – Building employability skills

These are the abilities people need to function well at work. Whilst work experience helps, it's not essential. Skills come from many areas of life.

The skills employers look for

The list on the right shows common employability skills, but certain professions and different employers will have their own preferences. Find out what they are so your teenager can plan to show the relevant ones.

An example of an employability skill

An employer might value the ability to work as part of team. Everyone can do that, but how well a candidate might perform is important. Some people may be supportive, but others are loners, domineering, or selfish.

Those characteristics will affect how people behave in a teamwork situation. In turn, that can affect the performance of a whole team and its ability to get a project completed. It's important to recognise that, say, people who prefer to work alone, are not doomed. They might be better suited to another job – perhaps research, or programming or journalism.

Where to look for employability skills

An employer will look for evidence of particular abilities, so if leadership is important, help your teenager find simple examples from their past. Keep things in proportion – no-one expects a teenager to have formed, funded and led an Everest expedition at their stage of development.

Look widely at hobbies, interests, personal activities, sports, projects (personal or school), as well as any part-time, holiday or voluntary work.

Something as simple as joining with a group of friends on a sponsored work-out to raise money for a charity can probably be used to show evidence of initiative, organisation, teamwork, tenacity and people skills.

Whilst, say, being a member of a chess club supports having analytical skills, any work helping to run or organise events shows even more skills.

Remember the 'skill' part

Experience is one thing, a skill comes from being good at it. To make a real impact, aim to show not just examples of activities undertaken, but also challenges faced, how they were overcome and the positive results.

“A skill is the ability to do some something well, but find out which skills are valued.”



- Adaptability**
- Analytical skills**
- Communication**
- Decision making**
- Flexibility**
- Initiative**
- Innovation**
- IT skills**
- Leadership**
- Literacy**
- Negotiation**
- Networking**
- Numeracy skills**
- Organisation**
- Problem solving**
- Research**
- Teamwork**
- Time management**



The view of a careers coach

From Win-That-Job.com Founder, Jon Gregory

It's one thing to have found a job, a career or an industry that a teenager feels enthusiastic about and is qualified to work in, it's then quite another to actually win through at the application and interview stages. It can be a slog, with knock-backs along the way, and they can become discouraged.

Working with young people, I've found that it's vital to help them learn from the experience, adapt and keep following the road they've chosen. Parents can provide a much-needed sense of perspective by showing that there are always more opportunities, it's just a case of finding them.

For any job, there'll always be more than one applicant so rejection is a fact of life. However, there are several ways to help them improve their odds of winning from less than 1 in 100, to perhaps better than 1 in 5.

It's a numbers game

Target the jobs they CAN win. If they're under-qualified, suggest they don't apply, encourage them to get what's needed first. Alternatively, help them find a more entry-level job and plan to work their way up over time.

Learn from the rejections. There's always a reason, so plan to improve.

Preparation wins jobs, not qualifications

Obviously they count, but every applicant is likely to tick all of the requirements. Otherwise, why apply? Employers look for enthusiasm, genuine interest in the job opportunity and some indication of potential.

Teenagers can shine if parents help them do some basic research on the company, prepare before application and rehearse before an interview.

Believe it's possible

Most young people undervalue themselves, not realising the useful capabilities they have that can prove attractive to employers. Parents can make a huge difference to the employability of their teenager by helping them to realise that, not only do they have useful skills and experience already, companies recruit young people based more on their potential.

Realisation of those can give their confidence a much-needed boost, and that shines through, both on applications and at the interview stage.

"Most young people undervalue themselves, and don't realise they're attractive to employers."



"Teenagers can shine if their parents help them research, prepare and rehearse."



Step 5 – Steering a job-search

Whether your teenager is searching for a full-time job, an apprenticeship, a period of work experience, an internship or just part-time work to build some employability skills, the steps will be the same. Searching for opportunities, enquiring about them, applying and being interviewed will all be more successful with a systematic approach and ongoing practice.

Help them to make searching a daily habit

Young people often don't know where to start, so work together with your son or daughter, each of you doing something different, to ease them in.

- ✓ **Browse, look for job ads** and also register for email updates.
- ✓ **Talk to personal contacts**, ask for referrals. Do this 'personally', don't just blast out generic emails, texts and social media posts.
- ✓ **Contact companies** not yet advertising, ask about opportunities. This is surprisingly effective as proactive people are valued.
- ✓ **Use social media**, ask people already doing the job that your teenager wants how they got it. Ask whether they have any tips on applying and any idea of where to look and who to talk to.

Help them to prepare before submitting applications

An application, or requested CV, needs to not only show academic qualifications, but should demonstrate the qualities and strengths that are required for the position, within that particular company and industry.

- Above all, explicitly tick all of the main requirements boxes.
- Tailor the rest of the CV / application to the specific opportunity.
- Use the job description to identify the strengths to demonstrate.
- Present experiences that show initiative and achievements.
- Include examples of the key employability skills required.
- Make sure that genuine interest and enthusiasm shine through.

Always follow up

- People are busy, get into the habit of politely chasing them up.
- Maintain contacts, because things may arise in the future.
- Don't take rejection personally and always ask for feedback.



“Above all, explicitly tick all of the main requirements boxes.”

“Make sure they tailor CVs and applications to the specific opportunity.”





Step 6 – Preparing for interviews

When your teenager is invited for an interview, there are three things that will make a massive difference to their prospects of being the one to get that all important job offer or scheme place – **Research**, **Preparation** and **Rehearsal**. If you steer them through the following steps, their confidence will be higher and they'll perform much better with less stress on the day.



Research

- Re-read the job ad and description to note every requirement.
- Find out how the interview will run on the day and who'll be there.
- Browse the company, its products, its latest news and its people.
- Browse what's involved in doing the job and in training for it.
- Find out what challenges and opportunities the company faces.

“Help them prepare and they’ll perform better than at least 80% of the other applicants.”

Preparation

- Summarise why you think you're a good choice for this job.
- List questions that you think are likely to be asked.
- Handwrite answers, as you'd be likely to speak them.
- Practise speaking those answers aloud to yourself.
- Prepare your own questions to ask at the end of the interview.

Rehearsal

- ✓ Run a mock interview, using the questions you prepared.
- ✓ Practise entering a room, handshakes, your smile, eye contact.
- ✓ Do a dry run to the location for familiarity and to avoid risk.
- ✓ Plan and organise all clothes and materials the day before.

If they follow even the basics of the above, you'll probably help them to perform better than at least 80% of the people who will also be interviewed. There are no guarantees for any one interview as things can be close, but the above routine and experience will cut the number they ultimately have to go through before winning that job.





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Contributing experts

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Jon helps pupils, students and professionals to find the right path and then get on it via the site he founded and edits at Win-That-Job.com. He's a trainer, blogger and writer on careers and job-hunting and also a qualified and experienced management professional and recruitment advisor. Jon is a regular expert panel member with The Guardian, an ambassador for National Careers Week and the published author of [Winning That Job](#). Catch him for free advice on Twitter [@letsfirewalk](#) or by using jon.gregory@win-that-job.com

Win-That-Job.com

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Win-That-Job.com The UK's No. 1 site for free end-to-end job-hunt advice.

Resources for parents of teenagers – www.win-that-job.com/parents

Supporting organisations

National Careers Week

National Careers Week (NCW) aims to provide a focus for careers guidance activity at an important stage in the academic calendar to help support young people leaving education. Careers Week encourages education providers to bring together students, advisers and local employers via organised careers events and activities.

Find them at nationalcareersweek.com

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