

Family & Caring Adult Table Talk

A Guide to Student Career Exploration and Planning



This Guide provides ideas on how to talk with your teen about careers and occupations that may interest them—along with ways to help them consider their options. These conversations can support your teen as they plan their next steps for education, skills training, and a career after high school.

Allowing your teen to take the lead in this process builds their confidence for making future decisions. You can help them by being present to listen to their ideas. Focus on listening openly, without judgment, allowing your student to explore their ideas and reflecting back to them what you hear, instead of offering advice right away.

As you engage your student in discussions about their postsecondary choices, you may not always get the kind of response that you hoped for. That's ok. The goal is to let your teen know that you're available as they consider their options.

Starter Questions on Future Careers and Planning

Here are questions that may help to guide discussions with your teen related to plans for education and work beyond high school.



Career and Personal Interests (Passions)

- What is your favorite subject or activity in or outside of school and why do you enjoy it?
- Do you think those activities that you're passionate about would be applicable to a career you'd like to have in the future?
- Can you identify any people whose work you admire? What interests you about what they do?



Self Reflection and Thoughts about the Future

- What is important to you as you think about career areas and paths you're exploring? For example, have you thought about the type of work environment that would suit you?
- How are you thinking about money? How much does pay/income matter in career goals? Have you also considered how much money and time it'll cost, including evaluating the sticker vs. net price, for the education/training required to get to your career goal?
- Have you thought about ways that you can connect with others who have similar interests to yours and how to build relationships that could be helpful for you personally and professionally later in life?



Career Exploration Strategies

- Are there any volunteer opportunities or part-time jobs you could explore to gain experience in a field that interests you?
- Are there career areas or industries that you're curious about that you could explore?
- Are there career areas that you have ruled out and do not want to explore because they don't interest you or match your values?



Thinking about Education Pathways

- What are the strengths that you have experienced in school and how do you plan to build on them after high school?
- How about any challenges? How might you work through those?
- Are you aware of what education and training is required for the careers that you're interested in? Is there more than one education pathway that could lead to working in your career fields of interest?
- Are you aware of sources of funding that can support your plans to further your education?

Sample Conversations

Below are sample conversations between a caring adult and a student. You can use this as a reference and source of inspiration for dialogues with your students.

Family Member/Teen Script 1

Adult: I noticed that there are some careers highlighted on your PSAT score report. Have you been thinking about some career options to explore?

Student: *I haven't really thought much about it.*

Adult: This seems like a good time to start thinking about what direction you may want to go in after high school.

Student: *Yeah, I really like my art classes. I might want to find a college that has a good art program. My teacher talked about graphic design and animation and those sound cool.*

Adult: Those are interesting options. Have you thought about the education or training you'll need for those careers?

Student: *Not really, but my school counselor is arranging visits for some people to the art school for a day. I think that I'd like that.*

Adult: That would be great to combine a college visit with meeting some of the students in the arts program.

Student: *Yeah, I can talk with my counselor about it.*

Family Member/Teen Script 2

Adult: It's hard to believe that you're already a sophomore (junior, senior) in high school already. Any thoughts about your plans after you graduate?

Student: *Not really, I'm not sure.*

Adult: Well, if you had to make a guess based on what you know and what you like right now, what do you think you would say?

Student: *OK, well I've always liked computers and I have learned some coding so maybe something with tech?*

Adult: There are certainly lots of options there. Great idea. Maybe your computer teacher could suggest someone at a business who works in tech that you could talk with or shadow for a few hours.

Student: *What do you mean "shadow"?*

Adult: Shadowing is when you spend time watching what someone does in their job and you ask them some questions or see what you can learn from watching.

Student: *That sounds good. Where do I start?*

Adult: You could ask your school counselor about it.

Student: *Ok, I can do that and see what he/she says.*

Adult: Great, let me know what you find out and I am happy to support. We can also continue exploring potential careers and colleges together on BigFuture.

Through this journey, keep in mind that:



Many students experience uncertainty about postsecondary plans.

It is important to consider the benefits of different careers and educational options. Career and educational decision-making is stressful. Be aware of your student's emotional needs and encourage them to practice good self-care related to diet, exercise and sleep. Encourage them to talk to a counselor or another trusted adult when they feel overwhelmed.



Interests, values, skills and initial plans can change based on learning new information or changes in life circumstances.

Help your student to explore all options. You can help to gather information and make a list of pros and cons. Their school counselor or career advisor can assist.



Mentors and role models are important during moments of transition and change.

Helping your teen gather a variety of opinions from trusted advisors can be valuable in the decision-making process.



As you and your teen continue to gather information, there are many available resources.

College Board has built free resources to help young people plan for life after high school on bigfuture.org.

Using the SAT Suite with Career Planning

While any time is a good time to check in with your teen about future planning, there are some specific moments that may spark conversation. For example, beginning with the digital PSAT 8/9 and PSAT/NMSQT this fall, your teen's SAT Suite score report will have Career Insights —examples of in demand careers in your state which can ignite their curiosity around careers.

Here are questions that you can use as a starting point to connect what they see to planning for their future.

- Are there careers or career areas that appeal to you more than others?
- What aspects of those career areas are important to you?
- What do the career areas that you're considering have in common?
- Are there careers or career areas that you're most curious about?
How can you find out more?

This is a great moment to turn interest into action.

Career Insights is just a starting point for the student to explore what excites them the most. And if students want a more personalized view of how their SAT Suite scores and interests connect to specific careers, they can go to bigfuture.org.

Additional Resources

BigFuture helps millions of students personalize their plan for their future with free resources to explore careers, plan for college, and pay for college. You can find resources for yourself and your teen on **bigfuture.org**.

PARENTS AND CARING ADULTS



RESOURCE HUB

[bigfuture.collegeboard.org/
communities-events/for-parents](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/communities-events/for-parents)

NAVIGATING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS



[bigfuture.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/
navigating-multiple-pathways-guide.pdf](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/navigating-multiple-pathways-guide.pdf)

WHAT ARE CAREER INSIGHTS IN

PSAT/SAT SCORE REPORTS



[bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers/
what-are-career-insights](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers/what-are-career-insights)

This Guide was developed in collaboration with the National Career Development Association (NCDA). NCDA is the first and longest running career development organization in the world that develops standards and provides professional development for educators who empower individuals to achieve their career and life goals. Learn more at ncda.org.

Main contributor: Celeste Hall, M.Ed., CCSP, Facilitating Career Development Instructor/Master Trainer, NCDA Trustee for K-12 School Career Counselors and Specialists.

Contributions from NCDA Constituency members: Dr. Rebecca Dedmond, Tim Poynton, and Sherry Williams.

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Learn more at bigfuture.org