

Career Development Parent Handbook¹

A parent's guide to career awareness & exploration...

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WHY SHOULD MY CHILD EXPLORE CAREERS?

For your child to make good career decisions, he or she must explore and investigate many careers. Active participation in career exploration activities will help your child become aware of the many career opportunities available and the steps that need to be taken to reach his or her career goals. Some advantages of career exploration include:

- Exposing your child to careers he or she may have never considered; and
- Discovering the various types of post-high school education and training, as well as their costs, so your child does not waste time and money getting training unrelated to his or her chosen career.
- Understanding the work environments of interesting careers:

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GET AN EARLY START?

It's important to get an early start on career awareness because this awareness can:

- Increase your child's interest in school,
- Decrease the possibility your child will drop out, and
- Show your child that what she/he is doing in school now is the key to achieving their own future goals.

While in elementary school, you can help your child:

- Discover the variety of careers;
- Connect what she/he is learning in school to real-world situations;

¹ Adapted from publications developed by America's Career Resource Network (ACRN) and the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE)

- Imagine himself or herself in an occupation; and
- Develop skills such as working and playing with others, making decisions, solving problems, and being a leader—these are important work readiness skills.

Often, children’s knowledge of careers is limited to what they see on television or what their families do for a living. One of the best ways to prepare your child for work is to teach her about a broad range of careers.

To help your child understand how his or her schoolwork is needed in a future career, show how workers use those skills in their jobs. For example:

- A veterinarian uses math skills to calculate the amount of medicine a cat will need;
- A police officer needs writing skills to compose reports; and
- A carpenter needs a variety of math skills to complete a construction project.

It’s up to you to show your child the direct link between school and career and to make it clear that school success opens doors to career success.

IS EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION ABOUT CHOOSING A CAREER AND STICKING WITH IT?

No. Early career development is to get your child to see the countless career paths open to them. Career development is a life-long process and you should expect your child’s plans will change as he or she matures and gathers more information.

Exploring careers does not mean decisions are set in stone. It does mean your child will make better career decisions because she or he will more confidently move forward using the foundation laid in elementary school.

Here’s something to think about: The number one reason students drop out of college is a lack of career focus. And the more undecided a college student is, the more likely he or she will need to spend extra money and years in college earning a degree. Early career exploration is the key to college/career focus!

WHY IS MY HELP IMPORTANT?

Your help is most importance because:

- Research shows that parents and guardians have the greatest influence on their children’s career choices.
- As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else.
- You, more than anyone else, have the most interest in helping your child choose a rewarding career.
- You know your child’s future is too important to be left to luck or chance.

Great careers do not simply happen, they are the result of careful planning and you are the one person who can ensure your child makes their best possible choice

It's important to know that people choose careers for a variety of reasons:

- Some focus on what they have grown up around and choose careers similar to their parents or guardians;
- Some choose a career based on salary; and
- Some “fall into” a career because they started a job and decided to stay in it.

HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD CHOOSE A CAREER PATH?

The first step in choosing a career path is to identify your child's interests.

Why is this important? Because research shows your child will be more successful and more satisfied with his or her career choice if that choice is based on his or her interests.

Their interests point the way to the best possible career path. Here are a few questions you can ask your child to get a clearer picture her or his interests:

- What is your favorite school subject?
- What extracurricular activities do you enjoy the most?
- What are your hobbies?
- What do you like to do with friends?
- What special skills do you think you possess?
- What have you done that you are most proud of?
- What interests you the most?

Aside from asking your child directly, there are other ways to identify what interests him or her. Focus on the activities, books, movies, and television shows your child likes; look at the websites s/he visits and how s/he uses free time. Once you have helped your child identify interests, find ways to nurture those interests. Here are some ideas:

If your child has an interest in animals, he or she might like to:

- Join a 4-H club
- Volunteer at a local veterinary clinic
- Walk or care for a neighbor's dog

If your child has an interest in art, he or she might like to:

- Design a personal website
- Make birthday or holiday cards for relatives and friends
- Create graphics for the school newsletter

If your child likes to help people, he or she might like to:

- Be a summer camp counselor
- Babysit for a friend or relative
- Teach a younger child to read

If your child likes to build or repair things, he or she might like to:

- Build a radio or computer from a kit
- Take apart an old appliance and put it back together
- Design and build a bird house

If your child likes sports, he or she might like to:

- Play on a sports team
- Assist a coach
- Umpire or referee community games

These are just a few activities that will help your child explore his or her interests and better prepare them to make decisions regarding their future career. Your child also has the option to create and save their information for ongoing adjustment by using the High School Plan and Career Action Plan which they can access in a free “My Stuff” account on the California Career Center. Find time to help your child create an account and update their plans as necessary.

HOW DO I START TALKING TO MY CHILD ABOUT CAREERS?

One way to start talking to your child about careers is to show them how their interests relate to adult activities. For example:

- *If your child likes art*, discuss how adults use art to design houses, clothing, magazine ads, movie sets, and even toys. Explain that art is also used to draw cartoons, arrange flowers, and take photos for magazines and books.
- *If your child likes to be outdoors*, discuss how he or she can have a career that involves working outside, such as landscape architecture, forestry, archaeology, construction, marine biology, or commercial fishing.
- *If your child is very social*, discuss how people who like to talk and work with people may choose to work as a teacher, lawyer, customer service representative, receptionist, hotel manager, or an event planner.
- *If your child likes to help people*, talk about different ways he or she can do that in a career, such as working as a nurse, doctor, athletic trainer, paramedic, family counselor, or childcare worker.
- *If your child loves math*, talk with him or her about the possibility of becoming an accountant, a computer programmer, engineer, or statistician. You should also remind your child that almost all careers use basic math, so it is a very important skill to have.
- *If your child likes to keep others safe*, talk to them about a career as a police officer, forensic scientist, detective, investigator, parole officer, security guard, or firefighter.

WHAT SHOULD CAREER EXPLORATION LOOK LIKE?

Career exploration begins with the awareness of the variety of existing and newly emerging occupations. It continues with research the “trying out” of several occupations. There are two ways to explore careers: one is to investigate and the other is to experience. Help your child to engage in both.

Investigating Careers: Your child should collect as much information as possible about several career options. This way, he or she will be able to create a more realistic educational and career plan which will guide their decision-making. Career information that should be investigated includes:

- What education does this career require?
- Where is the education/training available?
- Am I able to access the education/training needed to enter this career?
- What is the future outlook for this career?
- What is the path for advancement in the career?
- What other careers are closely related to this career?
- What are the everyday tasks performed in this career?
- Do the tasks match my interests and work values?
- What are the normal work hours?
- Does this career require travel?
- What health and retirement benefits are generally found in this line of work?
- What are the typical wages for this career?
- Do I need to relocate to find a job?

Experiencing Careers: While your child is in middle and high school, he or she can participate in many career exploration activities. These activities can include:

- **Informational interviewing**
Encourage your child to call people who work in his or her chosen career. Your child should let each person know the purpose of the call and determine how much time the individual has to talk. Important questions for them to ask include:
 - What daily activities do you do on your job?
 - How did you choose this as your career?
 - What kind of training did you need to enter this career?
 - What do you like most about your work?
 - What do you like least about your work?
- **Career fairs.** Take every opportunity to attend career fairs with your child so you both have the chance to learn more about various careers. Career fairs are often offered in high schools, local colleges, or by local chambers of commerce.

- **[Job shadowing experiences](#)**
The more your child sees people in the work environment, the more informed he or she will be about possible careers. One example of a job shadowing opportunity for your child is to take part in the “Take Your Child to Work Day.”
- **[Internships and work-based learning](#)**
Help your child find an internship or work-based learning opportunity related to his or her career interest area. Check with your child’s high school to see if they are able to receive high school credit for this type of work experience. Internships and work-based learning may be paid or unpaid positions.
- **Volunteer work**
Encourage your child to volunteer for a business or organization that provides jobs in his or her career interest area.
- **[Career Technical Education \(CTE\) classes](#)**
Encourage your child to take CTE classes in an area that interests them to get hands-on experience with the tools and skills used in the career area.
- **Field trips**
Field trips are another way for your child to see workers in many different careers. Before your child goes on a field trip, ask him or her to watch for different types of workers and careers while on the field trip. Afterward, discuss those careers with your child. You may also arrange a field trip for you and your child to a business or organization that employs people in your child’s career of interest.

WHERE CAN MY CHILD FIND RELIABLE CAREER INFORMATION FOR EXPLORATION?

There are many resources for career exploration. If your child’s school has a career center, that is a good place to start. The local library may have a computerized career information delivery system (CIDS) which is a rich source of career information.

Another good source is the Internet. The following is a list of reliable Web sites for career awareness and exploration (several of the sites are in English only):

- **[California Career Resource Network \(CalCRN\)](#)**
- **[California Career Zone](#)**
- **[California Career Center](#)**
- **[California Career Café](#)**
- **[California Colleges](#)**
- **[America’s Career InfoNet](#)**

- [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
- [O*Net](#)

Remember...

Ultimately, career choice is a personal decision, so do not try to steer your child to a particular career because you think it is something they might like or should do. As an involved parent, provide your child with ample opportunities to explore their interests and learn about career opportunities. Your involvement and encouragement to think about careers from an early age will help your child's future success.

Because of your guidance and the opportunities you create, your child may change his or her career interests. Continue to encourage your child as career choices change—the more informed he or she is about careers, the better his or her career decisions will be.

[NOTE TO LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES (LEAS): The California Department of Education (CDE) wishes to thank the California Career Resource Network and the Sonoma County Office of Education for their permission to translate this handbook. As a form of assistance to LEAs, the CDE offers this translation free of charge. Because there can be variations in translation, LEAs should confer with local translators to determine any need for additions or modifications, including the addition of local contact information or local data, or modifications in language to suit the needs of specific language groups in the local community. If you have comments or questions regarding the translation, please e-mail the Clearinghouse for Multilingual Documents (CMD) at cmd@cde.ca.gov.]