



Connecting Children to the World of Work

Going to work is a big part of most of our lives. We spend many years in paid work from the time we first baby sit, mow lawns, or throw newspapers until we retire. There are important things we can do to help our children prepare for those years of work.

We can talk with our children about our work experiences. We can tell them about what we do at work. We can talk about both the satisfactions and the challenges. It is probably not good to talk to children about how we feel about work when we are especially unhappy with our job. We can wait for a time when our statements will be more balanced.

We can take our children to see people at work in various jobs. It may be possible to take your child for a visit to your job. It usually is not realistic for a child to be at work all day but you may find a time when they can visit for an hour or two. In addition, you can have them visit people with jobs that sound interesting to them. Or you may have them interview people about their jobs. Help them learn about the activities, challenges, and rewards of different kinds of jobs.

We can help children discover, explore, and develop their talents. Notice the things your child enjoys. Encourage him or her to read about and explore areas of interest. Some schools provide personality and interest tests that can help your child discover her or his talents. Ask your children's teachers about their areas of interest and excellence. See the unit "Learning and growing: Using your talents" for more ideas to help your child discover his or her talents.

Children should not rush the process to settle on a career. Most people are still refining their decisions about their careers even through adulthood. Childhood and adolescence are times to explore possibilities and learn about the world of work.

We can help children find satisfaction in productive work. Doing something worthwhile can be very satisfying. Notice and appreciate children's efforts to help out. Do not expect perfect performance. "You really worked hard cleaning the sink. Thank you for helping out!"

Provide children positive work experiences. A teen might volunteer to help at the library, work with a veterinarian, help a carpenter, or aid a teacher. The usual part-time jobs that teens get - in fast food and retail - are often poorly supervised and unrelated to their career interests. Such jobs may teach more dishonesty and cynicism than thrift and hard work. It is better to hook teens up with people who work in areas of interest to them. You may even find someone who will mentor your child and provide him or her meaningful work experience. Volunteer work may lead to an apprenticeship where your child can actually work in an area of interest. The amount of money earned is less important than the quality of experience gained.

Join your child in service opportunities. One of the blessings of work is the opportunity to make a contribution. Service is a good way to learn the satisfactions of contributing. Join your child in community cleanup, Habitat for Humanity, or in your own project to help a neighbor.

Applications:

List the jobs of as many people in your neighborhood as you can. List the jobs of friends and relatives. Talk about the work of each. Discuss which jobs sound interesting to your children. Visit or call those whose jobs interest your children. As appropriate, set up an interview with them or a visit to their workplace.

Take a walk through your neighborhood or through the business section of your community. Notice the different kinds of work that people do. List the jobs that support the community from construction workers to letter carriers to cooks to business people to bankers to writers to police to clerks, etc. Talk about the work done in the different occupations.

Go to the library and look up books on careers that sound interesting. Visit a website that tells about different careers.