

Work Skills

When children and youth have a strong educational and employment foundation, they can approach young adulthood with greater confidence and more options. Many of the skills of being a good student and employee are learned when children are young and built upon as they undertake education and employment. These experiences help youth to prepare for the job and career challenges they will face as independent adults.

Career Planning

1. Playing At Work

Encourage younger children to play "school teacher" or "store." They may need some props like a toy cash register or chalk and chalkboard. Talk about what they think people do in these jobs. **Level: 1**

2. Lemonade Stand

Allow your child to have a lemonade stand and help you with a yard sale to get the experience of being "in business." **Level: 1**

3. What's Involved In A Job

When watching TV together, challenge younger children to spot as many different jobs as they can. **Level: 1** Talk about the different careers that characters have and what type of education or training it takes to work in that field. **Levels: 1 2 3**

4. Learning About Careers

Sign up to take a career class at a community college with your youth or attend a career fair with them. Even if they only go to listen to the different employers describe the jobs, they'll learn valuable information about occupations. For older youth looking for a job, ask them to create a list of questions for employers before attending the job fair. **Levels: 2 3 4**

5. Reading Up On Your Heroes

When older youth talk about idols or heroes, have them read a biography of the person. For example, if your youth is very interested in racecar driving, suggest that they read the biography of the most recent winner of the Indy 500 to learn what kind of education and training one needs to be a racecar driver. **Levels: 2 3**

6. Skills Needed For Jobs

With young children, have them notice and name the kinds of tools or technologies different workers need. For example, you might ask what kind of equipment the fireman, postal worker, bank teller, or auto mechanic needs. **Levels: 1 2**

7. Take Your Child To Work

If your job allows, bring your youth to visit your workplace. Younger children can follow you around as you do the different tasks associated with your job. **Level: 1** Older youth can follow other employees to learn what kind of work is involved in their jobs. **Levels: 2 3**

8. The Importance Of Volunteering

Encourage youth to volunteer so they can learn about different jobs. For example, the youth could volunteer at the library, humane society, hospital, office, or an after-school program for younger children. Emphasize that volunteer activity looks good on a job application or resume. Talk to your youth about what kinds of activities they observed at each job site. Ask them what they liked and didn't like about each locale. **Levels: 2 3**

9. Working On A Career Plan

Draw a large triangle with your youth's career goal written on the top of the triangle (veterinarian, writer, accountant). Have the youth start at the bottom of the triangle and write in anything they are doing that will help them reach their career goal. For example, they might write "volunteered at Humane Society" or "took a summer writing class." Above this, have them write ideas of more things they could do to reach their goal, along with the names of people who could help them accomplish these things. **Levels: 2 3 4**

Employment

1. Why Work?

Encourage younger children to name 10 reasons why people work and put the list on the refrigerator so they can add to it. **Levels: 1 2** If your youth has friends who work, ask why their friends got jobs and what kinds of things they are able to do (pay for a car, buy more clothes) or not do (play sports) because of having a job. **Levels: 2 3**

2. Working For What You Want

If your youth isn't old enough to be employed but wants extra money to spend on clothes, games, etc., ask what they would be willing to do to earn the extra cash. They may be interested in babysitting or be able to mow lawns or clean up yards for neighbors. **Levels: 1 2**

3. What To Look For In A Job

When it comes time for your youth to get a job, ask them to make a list of the things they are looking for in a job and any factors that might affect where they could work. For example, your youth may want a job that doesn't require weekend work and they may need something that is close enough to walk to, or near public transportation. **Levels: 2 3**

4. Working In Your Area Of Interest

When looking for a job, suggest that the youth use his or her interest to help narrow down where to search for jobs. For example, if youth really like pizza, they could explore working in a pizza parlor. If they love clothes, they might apply at a clothing store in the mall. **Levels: 3 4**

5. Looking For A Job

There are many different ways to find a job. Ask youth to list different ways they could find out about a job, such as the newspaper or Internet. Have them ask their working friends or siblings how they heard about their jobs. If they know someone who works at a place they would like to work, encourage them to ask that person about job openings. You may know of a friend who would hire your youth. **Levels: 2 3 4**

6. Sharing Your Experience

As your youth prepares to look for their first job, share memories of your first job. Talk about what you liked and didn't like about the job, and if you were scared when you began working. Talk about what you learned and what that job led to. This helps youth realize that their first job won't be their last, and that we all move on to better jobs. **Levels: 3 4**

7. Job Applications

The first step in getting a job is filling out an application. Pick up some applications from local businesses and have the youth identify what kinds of information will be needed in order to fill out a job application. Let them practice filling out an application and then review it with them. **Levels: 3 4**

8. Keeping An Employment File

Have your youth keep a file that contains information about all of the jobs (even odd-jobs or volunteering) they have had. In it, they can list where they have worked, the dates, what they were paid, etc. They should also write down the names and addresses of people who are willing to provide references for them. Include organizations or clubs in which the youth has participated. When they go to apply for a job this information will be helpful in filling out an application. **Levels: 2 3 4**

9. Writing A Resume

When your youth has had a few jobs and is ready to put together a resume, go to the library or look on the Internet for examples of resumes. If your youth has access to a computer, have him/her use the "resume wizard" program to create their own. **Levels: 3 4**

10. Preparing For An Interview

Help youth prepare for an interview by brainstorming a list of possible questions that a prospective employer might ask. The youth could collect possible interview question ideas from family members, friends, career counselors, or books in the library. **Levels: 3 4**

11. Mock Interview

Have your youth prepare for an interview by doing a practice interview. After the youth has prepared a list of questions, you pretend to be the employer and conduct a mock interview. Talk about the answers - what sounded good and what might need to be done differently. Then reverse roles with your youth and have them play the employer! **Levels: 3 4**

12. Questions About The Job

As a prospective employee, the youth may have questions about things like hours, pay, and employee benefits. Before the interview, help your youth create a list of questions they would like to ask of the employer. **Levels: 3 4**

13. After The Interview

After your youth has had their first interview, talk to them about the importance of following up with their potential employer. Encourage them to pick one method of follow up (hand written thank you, phone call, e-mail) and then do it. **Levels: 3 4**

14. Understanding Your Paycheck

When your youth receives their first paycheck, celebrate! Make a special meal or go out to dinner. As you're eating, go over their pay stub with them and explain the various deductions (FICA, federal taxes, etc.) and what they are for. **Levels: 3 4**

15. Employee Benefits

When your youth gets their first job, encourage them to ask for written information about employee benefits. Go over this with them and talk about which benefits they might want to use, such as health insurance or a savings plan. Tell them about some of the employee benefits offered by your employer. **Levels: 3 4**

16. Early Practice For Being A Team Player

You can teach teamwork - an increasingly important job skill - by encouraging teamwork around the house. For example, when house cleaning needs to be done, have one child load the dirty dishes in the dishwasher and another unload the clean ones. **Levels: 1 2**

17. Being A Good Employee

Sometime when you are talking about jobs, ask your youth to imagine running their own business. Ask what kind of business they would like to own and what kinds of people they would want to employ. Have them describe what kinds of employee behavior they would like to see and what kinds of behavior might lead them to fire someone. **Levels: 2 3 4**

18. Handling Problems On the Job

When your youth has been working a little while, ask them to describe the tasks they do and what they like and dislike about their job. Ask them to describe how they are handling parts of their job that they do not like. Share with them some of the things you don't like about your job and how you handle them. Talk about possible ways they can deal with workplace problems. **Levels: 3 4**

19. Leaving A Job

Most of us do not keep a first job forever. When it becomes clear that the youth wants to leave their job, talk about how they will give their notice, what they need to do before they leave, etc. Ask them what they need to take away from that job in order to get their next job; for example, are there other employees that will be willing to give them a reference? Are there particular skills they need to learn - running certain equipment, using a certain computer program - in order to get a better job next time? Talk about why it is important to leave a job on good terms (the next employer may call the previous employer for a reference). **Levels: 3 4**

Foster Parent Comment

"The kids have impressed on us that they have to be cool in school. What I let them know is to think about the kids who might not be considered cool because they study a lot and what you will call them in 20 years - you will probably be calling them boss."

Decision Making

1. Starting Early

Let children and youth practice making decisions. Start teaching decision making early in life by giving young children simple choices (what to wear, picking up toys now or later, choosing which TV shows to watch, what to make for their school lunch, etc.). **Level: 1**

2. A Plan For Decision Making

When children and youth need to make a decision, encourage them to make a list of pros and cons. Talk them through the potential outcome of each choice. This is good practice for developing a method of thinking through future decisions. **Levels: 1 2 3**

3. Evaluating Decisions

When things happen - good and bad - as a result of a youth's decisions or actions, ask them to recall what factors went into making the decision or taking the action. Talk about how different decisions would have impacted the outcome. **Levels: 1 2 3**

4. Decision Making Games

With children and teens, play games that require decision making. Some of these games are: Life, Chess, Racko, Risk, and card games. As you play, ask kids to talk about what led them to make certain decisions or "moves" during the game. **Levels: 1 2 3**