

Decision Making and Goal Setting

Self-knowledge and knowledge about work and education are meaningless without the next step - making decisions based on this knowledge. Career decisions are not a single decision but many decisions, a series of age-appropriate choices. Career decisions further your child's understanding of themselves and of their options.

Career decisions take place at all stages of career development. As your children get older, they will make more (and probably more difficult) decisions. In middle school, they may choose which career paths to explore. In high school, they are deciding which classes to take, what to do after they graduate, and where to look for work. As adults, we also make career decisions regularly, for example, when we choose to enhance our skills or request a promotion.

Career decisions are made to answer any career planning question. If your child wonders whether he would like to work in the health field, he/she might decide to job shadow several people who work in the field. If your child wants to be a concert violinist, he/she might decide to join a youth orchestra to evaluate her talent and desire. Career decisions are integral in many of the choices your children make about what they do in school and how they spend their free time.

How can I help my child make career decisions?

There are many different methods for making decisions. No matter how your children make their decisions, it is important to recognize that the process is ongoing, or cyclic. They set a course. They follow the course. They evaluate the course. Along the way, they may encounter new opportunities and barriers that will cause them to change their course.

One model for making career decisions identifies six steps:

- 1. Engaging**
Before your children make a decision, they need to know that they need to make one AND decide to make one.
- 2. Understanding**
Next your children need to put together what they know about themselves and what they know about their options. (These are the first two elements of career planning - self-knowledge and knowledge of the world of work and education.) Your children should be adding to their self-knowledge and their knowledge about work and education regularly, through formal and informal activities.
- 3. Identifying**
At this step, your children look at the information they have gathered and determine how it all fits together. Does what I know about myself match what I am considering as my career or educational path? Which aspects of these are most important to me? As they analyze their options, they might decide to narrow or expand their list of possible choices.
- 4. Deciding**
Your children are now ready to evaluate their options. What are the pros and cons of each? What is most important to me? By prioritizing their choices, they are able to select an option that fits them best. Once they have a top choice, they can set one or more goals. A goal should be measurable; it needs to have a timeframe (states "when") and be specific (states "what" in measurable terms). A goal should also be achievable, and your children need to be motivated to accomplish it.

Cont.

5. **Acting**

Once they have made a decision - or set a goal - they can put a plan in place. A plan consists of action steps to work toward a goal. To develop those action steps, your children might have to look back on the information they have gathered about the option they have selected.

6. **Reflecting**

Once a plan is in place, your children will need to evaluate how they are doing over time. Have I taken the action steps? Did I discover new information about myself or about my choice? Do I need to revise any of my action steps? Do I need to revise my goals?

Decision making and goal setting techniques can be used throughout life. You may want to use these activities to help your children develop their decision-making skills:

Analyzing, Prioritizing, Deciding (Middle School or High School):

http://www.mychildsfuture.org/parents/activities/Activity_HS_AnalyzingPrioritizingDeciding.pdf

Back Up (High School, College, or First Job) :

http://www.mychildsfuture.org/parents/activities/Activity_college_BackUp.pdf

You may also want to use this online career decision making tool at <http://www.acrnetwork.org/decision.htm>.

What if my child wants to be a professional athlete?

We all know of a child who wants to be a professional athlete - or a rap artist, a movie star, a dot.com millionaire. Having a "dream" goal is wonderful and should not be discouraged. However, putting realistic action plans into place will demonstrate how important it is to have an alternative goal - a backup plan - in case the dream cannot be achieved.

Through a decision making and planning process, the child can look at the pros and cons of becoming a professional athlete. How many students play high school sports? What percentage of these athletes makes it in college? What about in the pros? (The odds of a high school football player becoming a professional are about 5,000 to 1. The odds in basketball are about 10,000 to 1.)

Your son or daughter may be talented, but it takes extraordinary talent to succeed at the collegiate level and beyond. Even the most gifted athlete can receive a career-ending injury at any time. That's why your child needs a back-up plan - one that starts with a strong academic foundation. What is it that attracts your child to sports? What other careers might appeal to similar interests? Are there other sports-related careers to consider - sports medicine, sports promotion, coaching, or physical education? The alternate goal may end up being equally as exciting as the dream goal!

Even though your children are choosing careers that they believe they will find rewarding, they need to keep in mind that there may be consequences to their decisions. They need to be prepared to "pay the price." For example, if your child wants to be a museum curator, she needs to be aware that the job market is limited and that she will likely have to accept lower level positions just to get her foot in the door before she finds her dream job (and an acceptable salary!).