

Stages of Career Development

Career development is truly "developmental." Just like math, it is difficult to learn more advanced concepts if we have not mastered the foundation skills. Our children need to engage in appropriate formal and informal career development activities to build their career management skills. As they do, they will grow in self-knowledge, knowledge about work and education, and skills in decision-making and planning. Their careers (and ours) are built over a lifetime.

Stages of career development are labeled and defined in different ways. The stages are most often associated with age. At the youngest or elementary grades, children are engaged in the Awareness stage; in middle school, the Exploration stage; in high school, college, and early adulthood, the Planning and Preparation stages; and the Establishment and Transition stages through adult life.

Our stage of development also depends on our "career maturity" and life and work situations. Career maturity relates to a person's readiness to perform career-related tasks. To perform these tasks, we need a positive attitude, skills, and knowledge. You probably have known adults, advanced in their work lives, who were thrust into unemployment. Even though they have worked for many years, they may not be prepared for a career change. Without adequate self-knowledge and knowledge of the world of work, they will most likely be unable to make an informed career decision. They may need to return to the activities associated with the Exploration stage to build the skills needed to make a successful career transition.

It is important to understand that your child will progress through the career development process at his/her own pace. At some point, the stages may even overlap, or your children may go back to an earlier stage. If you can recognize their stage of career development, you will know better how to support them.

Schools engage students in classroom career activities. Because they are working with a group of students, the activities are generally designed to address specific developmental stage. This assumes all students are at that same stage; and this most likely is not the case. If your child is struggling with an assigned career-related task, consider if he or she has the skills and knowledge to complete the task.

As your child moves through school, you will become increasingly involved in their planning. After high school, your involvement will likely decrease, but your continued support is just as vital. Even with the best planning, it is not unusual for children to be indecisive about their careers well into their 20's. And, just as with anything else in life, there are no guarantees. The most informed plan will not prevent mistakes, unforeseen events, or circumstances beyond one's control. However, by helping your child acquire career skills and by facilitating their beliefs in their own abilities, you arm them with the skills and information they need to move forward.