

## Helping teens make career decisions.

To find a satisfying career, young people need to understand their own interests, abilities and values. As a parent, we can assist in the process of helping them identify who they are. A range of careers can be explored, but this can be a tricky subject for you to discuss with your teenager.



### What is a Career?

A career is the paid and unpaid roles across a lifespan; life roles, leisure, learning and work. Career education and development is about lifelong learning. Teens worry about making one big career

decision, but they need to be reassured that the decision they need to make it about their “first step” on their career journey. We need to encourage young people to find an occupation or study option that fits their skills, interest, values and beliefs right now. This is their “start point” and as they progress through life they will continue to evaluate and adjust their career plan in response to external factors such as changes in their workplace, and internal factors like a shift in interest, opportunities that arise or a change in their family circumstances. Young people need to be aware that things won't always turn out as planned and they need to understand the importance of Plan B or alternative routes to achieve their career goals.

### What is career planning and how can I help?

Career planning can seem complex and a little scary to adults and youth alike. Remember that it's a journey and along the way they will learn, grow and change with each experience and benefit from the people they meet along the way. There are a number of steps involved with the career plan. When you think about helping your teen along his or her pathway, it might help to imagine you're planning a trip. After all, this will be a journey. When planning a trip you go through a number of steps to make it something that you enjoy. Just like planning for a trip, your career path can be broken down into steps.

#### 1. Self-Awareness

“Who you are and who do you want to become” has become a more important question than simply asking: “What do you want to be?”. We encourage students to have a strong awareness of self and their identity. Assist your teen to describe their strengths, interests, values and how these might relate to their goals and aspirations for the future.

#### ***How can I help my teen to identify their attributes, strengths and values?***

Personality tests are fun to do as a family and may help you to learn more about one other. The Myers Briggs Personality Profiling test is a popular one which identifies 16 different personality types. Have a go: [Myers Briggs 16 personalities](#) Get your family to complete the test and then get everyone to write down what they agree with when reading through their individual results. Each person could then show another member of the family and can add to the list pointing out their strengths and attributes. Once your teen has identified their personality type, they could research careers that are popular with this personality type.

Helping young people to identify their strengths is a great way to build motivation and self-



confidence. One way to do this is to get your teen to complete the [VIA Youth Character Strength](#) survey. This helps your teen to articulate their strengths and to understand how these may influence career choices. Having a strength inventory can also assist in applications, writing CV's and practising interview skills.

Talk with your teen about their interests, sports and other extracurricular activities. Point out the skills they demonstrate when doing these activities. For example – skate boarding requires persistence to nail a new trick and resilience when they fail. Cooking shows the ability to follow instructions and be systematic. Have a go at the skill matcher on Career NZ website [SkillMatcher](#) and identify careers that might match the skills they have developed from activities they have enjoyed.

Values can be difficult to explain, young people need to understand what is important to them in a work environment. For many, working with others is important, or for others its being part of a team. Help your teen identify what is important to them as an individual.

## 2. Exploring Opportunities

Students can identify opportunities that are available to them in life. Learning and work that relate to their culture, strengths, interests and aspirations. Help your teen access accurate information from a range of sources to explore their career interests and understand job prospects for the future. Rather than focusing on a specific occupation, encourage your teen to explore a career sector or cluster such as education, sport, business and understand the different roles within the sector. Look at what they need from school to access these opportunities e.g. what NCEA level do they need to achieve, or what subjects would be useful to them.



### ***How can I help my teen to identify what opportunities are out there based on their strengths and interests?***

[Career NZ](#) is a fantastic resource and has hundreds of different job profiles where young people can research different career options.

Encourage your teen to build a portfolio of different careers they have an interest in. Emphasise they are simply looking at all the options and there is no need to decide on a pathway until they are in their later years of school.

Other useful tools include: Career Quest [Career Quest](#) and Subject Matcher: [Subject Matcher](#).

[Got a Trade](#) helps broaden young people's minds about apprenticeship and trade options.

There is a small quiz they can do which might give them some ideas about trades they were not aware of and highlights the industry training organisations that support them.

[No Major Drama](#) is a great resource to help those looking at university to understand what majors might be worth investigating.



Labour market and job information is an important part of the career decision making process. Young people need to understand the opportunities, job prospects, growth industries and progression pathways in order to make an informed decision. The following websites provide information about employment opportunities and future prospects:

- [Labour Market](#)
- [Occupational Outlook](#)

Students should also attend guest speaker and liaison visits from tertiary providers and industry. Work experience and/or job shadowing is also a very effective way of exploring career options and getting a feel whether or not a certain avenue is the right pathway for them.

Take the opportunity to attend tertiary information evenings and open days with your teen where you can.

### 3. Deciding - making a decision

This is a critical step in the career planning process. Armed with self-knowledge and research, your teens' next step is to create a vision of what their preferred future might look like.

#### ***How can I help my teen to make well informed decisions?***

There are some great resources designed by Career NZ to help them understand what is important and how to compare options.

The PMI exercise is an important one. This is where young people identify in each option the pluses, minuses and interests of a career path or choice. This exercise allows your teen to consider the consequences of their decision. As a parent, it is helpful to do this alongside your teen so they can see the options from a different perspective. Here are some helpful links to assist with this process:

- [Make a career decision](#)
- [Compare Jobs](#)
- [Compare Study Options](#)
- [Study Spy](#)

Get your teen to make up a criteria and then review the information on different career pathways. Get them to rate each option on how well it fits with the following factors they have identified that are important to them from the self-awareness work they have done:

- Do these careers fit with what is important to me and my work values?
- Does it fit with my interests and use my strengths?
- What will my lifestyle look like in the short and long term?
- What would I gain and what would I have to give up?

Acknowledge your teen's fears and remind them that the "first step" is not carved in stone; their plans can change as they discover more about themselves and different courses and occupations. Some teens may find it hard to make a decision. Reinforce that this is a short-term decision and encourage them to keep as many options open as possible. There are several pathways to get to the same point. Young people fear that a decision in year 12 or 13 is irreversible – that once you opt into a course of study, that is it!

Fortunately, in New Zealand, this is not the case, many of our education facilities are flexible and have multiple entry points that are not age specific. However, with the high costs of study and student loans, it is important students do research their options and make their decision based on good information.





#### 4. Act and Make it Happen

Once they have a goal, your teen needs to develop a plan that will assist them to successfully transition out of secondary school, and on to further education, training or employment. This involves understanding

the education and training they will need for their chosen career. It also includes preparing applications to tertiary providers, ensuring your teen has a relevant up to date CV, they understand how to write a cover letter and to prepare for interviews. See links below for more information and templates.

It is also important that young people start either a manual or online portfolio gathering evidence of courses attended, part time work, volunteering and community work, sport and cultural activities. These are important for applications to tertiary training organisations and job hunting as they demonstrate transferrable skills gained from the activities. Some schools have career management programmes that allow students to store this information such as Career Central, Dreamcatcher, My Mahi, One Note and Kamar. Find out about the programme and facilities through these programmes available to parents at your school.

- [How to write a CV](#)
- [CV Template](#)
- [How to write a Cover Letter](#)
- [Cover Letter Template](#)
- [Preparing for interviews](#)