



Frequently asked questions about career exploration for youth with disabilities

Career exploration is an important step in helping a student fulfill long term employment goals. This exploration can help a student connect to a path that is appealing, fulfilling, and leads to a desired career.

The following key questions and answers will help with decision-making and information gathering concerning academic and career choices.

What is career exploration?

Career exploration is one way to find out about multiple career options. During the different phases of exploration, students take part in a variety of activities that can assist in figuring out their unique interests, skills, and talents. Students who have this knowledge are better prepared to identify next steps in postsecondary schooling or other means leading to a future career.

Why is career exploration important?

Career exploration is an important tool in helping to find a desired career. The steps students take in career exploration can help guide in making positive, well informed educational and career decisions.

Who benefits from career exploration?

Students benefit from taking advantage of career exploration by their exposure to a variety of career options. These options can include those areas a student is interested in exploring, and needs more information about.

Who can help a student with career exploration?

Over a period of time, students work with several different individuals who will help them explore various careers and develop a career path. Parents can be key members of the team. Other team members may include teachers, school guidance counselors, siblings, peers, and employers. A student with a disability may want to discuss and begin to set some of their career exploration goals with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) team at their next IEP meeting.

Where does career exploration occur?

Career exploration can occur in the home, at school, and in the community. At home, students can talk with parents, older siblings and relatives about career options and choices. For example, a student can prepare a list of questions for a parent, gathering information on how they chose their career and what skills and interests they found important in making their career choice. They might ask, “if you could choose today, what career would you choose, and why?” In the community, a student might talk to a small business owner and find out how they chose to go into business. Students can take the opportunity to discuss a variety of career options in the business, nonprofit, and government sectors.

What are some examples of career exploration activities?

There are numerous ways that students learn about careers and workplace opportunities. **Some of these activities include:**

- **Researching online.** There are many resources available to help students to explore and locate information about careers. Going online to research is only the beginning, but can prove a comfortable way to begin on a student’s path in career exploration. Key search words include: career exploration, career options, career development, employment choices, and career path or pathways. A student can find information about careers, recommended career pathways, salaries, and educational requirements, as well as interests, skills, and talents relevant to a particular career.
- **Listening to career related guest speakers.** Schools often feature guest speakers who share information about a company and its career opportunities. Speakers also provide information about the skills needed for business success.
- **Attending career fairs, career days, and career camps.** These specialized activities, often held in early spring or summer, provide opportunities to learn about a variety of careers. Local businesses and companies with a national presence are often in attendance.
- **Attending workplace tours and visits.** These group activities allow an employer to give students an inside look at how a workplace operates, what it provides, and the types of career opportunities available. Workplace tours and visits can sometimes be arranged for an individual. These activities are a great way to show a student the wide range of occupations and career options within a workplace. During the tour the employer may offer hands-on experiences or opportunities.
- **Participating in summer employment career opportunities.** These employment programs, held in the summer, provide real jobs or paid internships with a company. Currently many of these programs focus on careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Also in the summer, companies may offer informational interviews so that students can speak with staff about various careers, prerequisites for employment such as schooling requirements, and the student’s interests and skills.
- **Participating in job shadowing.** Students gain first-hand experience and an up close look by accompanying a professional in the workplace as they do their job. During this half- to full-day experience, the student may meet a variety of workers at the business and hear their employment stories.
- **Career focused mentoring.** A student is matched with an adult mentor who assists the student in career exploration and development. Mentoring provides individual attention and the opportunity to explore a career in greater depth.
- **Volunteering, seeking internships, and participating in community service opportunities.** These activities provide opportunities to learn about particular fields, explore small or large workplaces, and learn about the differences between for profit versus nonprofit organizations.

How do I gain access to career exploration activities?

For students with disabilities, one way to help prepare for a career is to set future goals and objectives. What does the student want to be, or what career would he or she like to have? Students and their families can use the IEP process and transition planning to begin to take the early steps in career exploration. Besides identifying and specifying school courses and academics, the IEP team can be useful in helping the student to explore various careers. In addition to IEP team members, students may talk to teachers, school counselors and others while exploring and charting a career course.

Resources

College or Training Programs: How to Decide Tips for Youth. NPC-26, PACER Center, <http://www.PACER.org/transition/resource-library/publications/NPC-26.pdf>

Set an Employment Destination and Map a Course to Get There. NPC-13, PACER Center, <http://www.PACER.org/transition/resource-library/publications/NPC-13.pdf>

Start Now to Chart Your Youth’s Career Path after Graduation. NPC-17, PACER Center, <http://www.PACER.org/transition/resource-library/publications/NPC-17.pdf>