

INSPIRING POSSIBILITIES

Start Now to Chart Your Youth's Career Path after Graduation

Your young adult's high school diploma opens the doors to many exciting, new opportunities. These options might include a first full-time job; attendance at a technical school, community college, or university; or self-employment. By exploring interests and choices now, you can better help your young adult decide which career path to take upon high school graduation.

The members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team may have already discussed some options with you. As a parent, you may have some good ideas about what your son or daughter would like to do after graduation. Have you noticed what he or she most looks forward to doing upon returning home from school? What are his or her hobbies or special interests? When does he or she feel passion or become immersed in activities? These interests may all point to potential career paths.

Talk with your son or daughter about what you notice and ask whether he or she thinks that your observations are accurate. Sometimes, having a parent or mentor point out a young adult's interests and strengths will help him or her picture a future with more career options. Research shows that youth who can see their dreams as possible paths toward employment are much more likely to reach their career goals.

Most youth under the age of 20 are not developmentally ready to think very far into the future. Some will become stressed, angry, or withdrawn if pushed too directly to think about choices outside of their experience. Early, ongoing career exploration can help you raise the topic at times when your son or daughter is most receptive.

Consider these Career Exploration Ideas

Expanding on your young adult's interests, strengths, and abilities is one way to explore career options and make an informed decision about the future. Your son or daughter may want to consider participating in formal

Meet Ariana*

Ariana loved helping her father in his workshop. She built bookcases for her bedroom and helped construct a bus stop shelter at the end of her driveway for her younger brother. When her parents heard about a summer volunteer program to help construct homes for low-income families, they signed up together. With her parents' supervision, Ariana helped attach decking, frame walls, put up wall board, and follow the progress on the blueprints. When she went back to school that fall, she signed up for a computer-aided design class and discovered she was good at spatial concepts and mechanical rendering of three-dimensional products. Ariana is not sure how she will use her talent in the future, but with help from her parents and guidance counselors she is researching technical schools. She is eager to find a career that matches her understanding of construction principles and spatial design.

**Names and identifying characteristics have been changed.*

programs such as apprenticeships, job shadowing, community- or faith-based service projects, and programs open to high school students at a community college, university, or technical school. Another option is to look for specialized summer camps. Career exploration also can include informal experiences such as visiting colleges or technical schools, starting up a lawn care, dog walking, or other small business, touring a manufacturing company, or volunteering to help out a political party or nonprofit organization.

Remember that Career Paths Can Be Direct or Indirect

Sometimes the career path your young adult chooses will be direct. For example, he or she may want to work in the medical field and decide to try a certified nursing assistant or registered nurse program. Maybe he or she has already volunteered at the local hospital as a candy striper or helped out informally while visiting a grandparent in a nursing home. An Internet or library search will provide information about the schools that offer appropriate programs, the entry requirements, cost, length, and available. The guidance counselor may have some information to help direct your search.

Sometimes the path will be indirect. Perhaps your son or daughter wants to attend a technical school or a college but He or she may have completed all the high school required classes or may need to take additional courses before being eligible for remedial courses to make up for classes missed in high school. A summer school course at a university or college might also help determine whether a program is right for your son or daughter. The summer school requirements at many universities and colleges are often less stringent than those for the regular year. A summer class can be a good testing ground before deciding on postsecondary training or education.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”
~Eleanor Roosevelt

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Use the IEP to Prepare for a Career

The IEP should help your son or daughter prepare for future goals. Besides specifying high school courses that will provide a strong foundation, the IEP could include activities such as:

- An evening or weekend course at a community college or an adult continuing education program. Attending such a class might help your son or daughter try out transportation options, experience a new learning environment, use high school accommodations in a new setting, or explore what future careers are really like.
- Internships, part-time jobs, or volunteer and community service opportunities. These activities can provide hands-on experience to help define your youth's depth of interest in a specific career.

Meet Simcha*

Simcha's IEP goal was to find a part-time summer job. His IEP team noticed he was good at paying attention to details and keeping his work area orderly and clean, so they recommended that he look for a janitorial position. His father, a precision welder at a machine shop, heard that the shop needed cleaning support. He suggested his son might be a good candidate, and Simcha was hired. Simcha followed directions well and enjoyed being around the machines. When a worker called in sick, his supervisor tried Simcha out machining dental drills. This job involved putting 500 pre-cut parts into a holder to be installed in the machine. The machine removed each individual part from the holder and ground each one into shape. Simcha checked each finished part mechanically and visually for flaws. He also learned to deburr parts with a file. He enjoyed doing these jobs at the shop and was soon given full-time summer employment. That fall, the career goals in his IEP were changed from janitor to machining assistant.

- Pre-college programs specifically designed for high school students the summer before or after their senior year. The IEP team often can arrange financial payment of these exploratory courses if they support career goals.

Translating your young adult's strengths, interests, and dreams into career goals takes time and effort. By taking advantage of some real-life work experiences, your network of friends and associates, and some family-supported career exploration, your son or daughter may discover options to add to those developed by the IEP team. These first exploratory steps can be expanded upon and enhanced as your youth continues on his or her career path.

Meet Song*

Song always enjoyed visiting her aunt on the family farm. The summer she was 15, she discussed raising chickens like her older cousins did. Her parents helped her order 500 chicks from a hatchery, and her cousins helped her set up a heated area in her aunt's barn for the newly hatched birds. Song fed and watered the chickens every day. Her aunt helped her track the costs of feed and the death loss. In 10 weeks, Song had 470 chickens to be butchered.

The whole family participated in processing the chickens and sold them off the farm along with berries and produce. After all the costs were subtracted, Song identified how much profit she had made from each chicken and had a list of customers for next summer. Song learned how to work consistently every day and to pay attention to details so that the chicks would thrive. She learned how to welcome customers and give them brief farm tours when requested. She also learned how to give change and encourage a customer to purchase additional items. The next year, with the support of the county's Farm Service Agency, she was able to take out a \$5,000 agriculture loan designed for youth under the age of 18 and expand her small business.

Resources

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency provides agriculture small business loans to rural youth. Website: fsa.usda.gov (search for rural youth loans)

I Seek provides information on Minnesota careers, education, jobs, and self employment. Website: iseek.org

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities provide information on certificate, two-year, and four-year options. Website: mnscu.edu

Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) offers high school juniors and seniors (in public, private, or home schools) the opportunity to take courses at eligible postsecondary institutions. Phone: (651) 582-8471 Website: education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/CollReadi/PSEO.

University of Washington's Do-It Program offers "Preparing for College: An Online Tutorial." Website: washington.edu/doiit/preparing-college-online-tutorial

WorkForce Centers provide job training, education, and employment services at a single neighborhood location. **Rehabilitation Services** are housed in these centers and can help people with disabilities achieve their employment and independent living goals. Career training at technical schools, community colleges, and universities can be partially paid for through Rehabilitation Services. Website for WorkForce Centers: mnwfc.org and Website for Rehabilitation Services: <http://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/>; Phone for Rehabilitation Services: (651) 296-5616; 888-GET-JOBS (toll free); (651) 296-3900 (TTY); (800) 657-3973 (TTY).