

A Parents' Guide to Career Development

The most valuable things parents can do to help a student with career planning are:

- Listen
- Be open to ideas
- Help your student find information

Here are eight more things you can do to help:

1. Encourage your child to visit the career center (and you go too!)

Next time you visit campus, drop into the career services office and pick up a business card from one of the career counselors. When your son or daughter is feeling anxious about his/her future, offer the card and say, "Please call this person. He (or she) can help you."

Many students use their first semester to "settle into" college life, and so the spring semester of the freshman year is the optimal time to start using career center services. Ask your student (in an off-handed way), "Have you visited the career center?" If you hear, "You only go there when you are a senior," then it's time to reassure him/her that meeting with a career counselor can take place at any point—and should take place frequently—throughout a college career.

Many centers offer a full range of career development and job-search help, including:

- Mock interviews
- A network of alumni willing to talk about their jobs and careers
- A library of books (including an online library of information) on a wide range of careers
- Workshops on writing resumes and cover letters
- A recruiting program
- Individual advising

2. Advise your student to write a resume

Writing a resume can be a "reality test" and can help a student identify weak areas that require improvement. Suggest that your student get sample resumes from the career center.

You can review resume drafts for grammar, spelling, and content, but recommend that the final product be critiqued by a career center professional.

3. Challenge your student to become "occupationally literate."

Ask: "Do you have any ideas about what you might want to do when you graduate?"

If your student seems unsure, you can talk about personal qualities you see as talents and strengths. You can also recommend:

- Taking a "self-assessment inventory," such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
- Talking to favorite faculty members
- Researching a variety of interesting career fields and employers

A career decision should be a process and not a one-time, last-minute event.

4. Emphasize the importance of internships

The career center will not "place" your child in a job at graduation. Colleges grant degrees, but not job guarantees, so having relevant experience in this competitive job market is critical.

Your son or daughter can sample career options by completing internships and experimenting with summer employment opportunities or volunteer work.

Why an internship?

- Employers are interested in communication, problem-solving, and administrative skills, which can be developed through internships.
- Employers look for experience on a student's resume and often hire from within their own internship programs.
- Having a high GPA is not enough.
- A strong letter of recommendation from an internship supervisor may tip the scale of an important interview in their favor.

5. Encourage extracurricular involvement

Part of experiencing college life is to be involved and active outside the classroom. Interpersonal and leadership skills—qualities valued by future employers—are often developed in extracurricular activities.

6. Help your student to stay up-to-date with current events

Employers will expect students to know what is happening around them. Buy your student a subscription to The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal.

7. Teach the value of networking

Introduce your student to people who have the careers/jobs that are of interest. Suggest your son or daughter contact people in your personal and professional networks for information on summer jobs. Encourage your child to "shadow" someone in the workplace to increase awareness of interesting career fields.

8. Help the career center

Call your campus career center when you have a summer, part-time, or full-time job opening. The staff will help you find a hard-working student. If your company hires interns, have the internships listed in the career center. Join the campus career center's career advisory network and use your "real world" experience to advise students of their career options.

By Thomas J. Denham. Courtesy of the National Association of Colleges and Employers.